

STASH
of the
MARSH
COUNTRY

HAROLD
WALDO


nia
l

STASH OF THE
MARSH COUNTRY

HAROLD WALDO

STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

BY
HAROLD WALDO

NEW  YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

**COPYRIGHT, 1921,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY**



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
MY GOOD FRIEND
RUPERT HUGHES
A FRIEND OF POLES
WHERE ANY POLES ARE LIVING

2138825

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE:	PAGE
STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY	11
BOOK TWO:	
THE DAWN OF SPLENDID EMPRISE	35
BOOK THREE:	
THE SHADOW OF CASTLE DURAND	61
BOOK FOUR:	
THE GIFT THAT IS GREATEST OF ALL	121
BOOK FIVE:	
"BACK TO THE BOULEVARDS"	163
BOOK SIX:	
MARIKA OF THE CROSSROADS	193
BOOK SEVEN:	
THE BOHEMIAN GIRL	239
BOOK EIGHT:	
FLYING GLORY	261
BOOK NINE:	
THE SPLENDID ENTERPRISE AT LAST	297

**STASH OF THE
MARSH COUNTRY**

BOOK ONE: STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

I

Detroit . . . Stash remembered nothing of that city but the name. For he was a tiny boy when his father, mother and Uncle Jan brought him away to the Marsh Country. But he heard the name chiming like a bell tone on their Polish lips . . . Detroit! And he got the notion that it was a blue city—all a grand blue—and that they had been wonderfully happy there.

Detroit in truth had given them no great luck. They had brought out of Poland the sales money of their beggar nobility estates, only to sink it in Detroit waste land. Then, guided by an iron-headed relative, they had come to this strange country below Lake Michigan—where smaller bodies, Lantern Lake, Koban and Vermilion, dotted the marshland with wild beauty.

No wonder they were called *the gay Plazarskis*: proud Jan, merry Bolish—and his little thornapple flower wife, Marynia. They had the hardihood to buy old Koban Lake Hotel—with its rotten wharf and piling, and its gloomy corridors, where very peculiar happenings had occurred.

12 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

In those early days they made the bleak lobbies ring: and believed that nice young lawyer, Fentree of Durand, could always fix up the mortgage extension—like re-tying an old black sash.

Durand, the big town, swelled up, a brick paved island, out of the swaley menace of the marsh lands. Dark tamarack groves and blear old gun clubs gave an air of sad warning to the country; but in spite of this, Polish and Bohemian farmers flourished on the meadow flats and poured in big crowds to the hotel dances at Koban Lake.

At these great affairs Stash sat with his baby brother Savo on his lap, watching his father Bolish and great dark Uncle Jan, bravest of all dancers. Gripping Savo's stomach good with one hand, he pointed out their girl mother—flying so swift and beautiful: "Dere's Matka!" He could hardly believe she belonged to them.

It was hard for the youngish lawyer Fentree to credit the tempestuous little lady with three small sons. Stash, the middle one, was his pick. But he was fond of the whole family of strange wilful creatures.

He had never forgotten that the people of Koban crossroads had given him his start. A shabby young lawyer from Ohio, he had gotten to the point of writing secretly despairing letters to the girl back home, pleading shame and fear of his incompetence, when suddenly he had won the loyalty of these Koban Lake people by clearing a young Bohemian boy of homicide. All their affairs were brought to *Mist' Fen*, as they called him; and the girl from Marietta came on, bringing him happiness and home. Whenever he thought of the childish gratitude and generosity of these people

he resolved to some day do something noble and fine for them. In his heart they came to be *his people*.

But so far as Stash's family were concerned he could make no hand of their muddled affairs. Stash's father had been carried off to Detroit to meet a prison sentence for financial bungling. And when that once light-hearted fellow came back—queer and staring-eyed—his little wife had run away from him with the Durand *Savoy* fiddler, Jack Cardoul. So Stash's lovely matka had flown. His crazed father then had left, to wander the country, singing for a living in dance hall and saloon. And a night came at length when Fentree could no longer manage that black sash—the mortgage tape.

Yet he meant to have a last try—for the sake of proud Jan. It was a hot summer night when he left the lights of South Durand twinkling behind. With a soft shattering rustle the dark lake lapped the causeway, where his horse's hoofs ran drumming. The hotel lifted like a blazing elevator on the misty prairie, and the mournful billows of *Danube Vlny* rocked out on the still, hot night. A hotel dance was on.

II

How happy Stash was to see the stooped shoulders ploughing across the big room towards him! There were puckery wrinkles of kindness about the lawyer's sharp hazel eyes. He had a way of drumming Stash's fist on his own tall knee as they sat side by side. Next to Uncle Jan he was the best man Stash knew.

And Uncle Jan had been queer enough to-day to frighten a fellow like Stash. He had drunk a lot of *Slivovice* and now was dancing like mad. He launched

14 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

up to the lawyer presently, carrying sleepy Savo, whose grubby feet soiled his embroidered white shirt with 'its cherry ribbon tie, and handed Fentree some papers, lingering as if he would tell him something. . . . With his sunken dark eyes only, it would seem.

Despairing of doing business with Jan and the swarthy morose mortgagee, at least until the dance was over, Fentree lagged slowly up to his room. He tried to read "Tittlebat Titmouse"—which he carried as a legal man's night reading,—but the rankling sweetness of the girls' voices drifted up to disturb him. . . . All through the old hotel, with its musty harvest heat and the tart charm of its pretty Czech dancers, he felt a queer disquieting imminence. . . . Opening the manila envelope Jan had given him, he found letters and affidavits that explained the secret of Stash's ruined father—"Loony" Bolish. He had been suborned to perjury by old "Whaleback" Walewski, the iron-headed relative who had steered the family to the marsh country. Old Step Walewski, with the fierce reddish brown eyes, had done it! He had not only entangled the family fortunes in canal and whaleback freighter stocks, and seen Bolish sent to prison for his own malfeasance, but had sent word to the young fellow in prison that his little wife was carrying on—disgracing him! No wonder the poor boy's haunted terrible face had driven Marynia into flight! Fentree's brain thundered with anger and the pity of it.

He turned to the comforting dullness of "Tittlebat"; and listening to carriage loads departing in the velvet dark night—then reading again—he fell into a half sleep. . . . A reverberating bang brought him to his feet—and down the hall—to a door that dusted yellow light and acrid smoke upon him.

Proud Uncle Jan lay on the floor like a waxwork of dying Custer that Fentree had once seen. On one glass of "red ink" an olive-colored oil from a man's lips still wormed uneasily. The lawyer thrust round the paper-littered table—and saw the smudged marble face of Jastrow the mortgagee staring blankly from the floor. Then Jan had shot him! The revolver lay close to Jan's hand—as if he had finished himself! Fentree turned with a start. . . . Young Stash Plazarski stood in the doorway. The little fellow began to cry, to sob, with frightened heaves of his small chest. It seemed as if a small boy inside the man began to cry in sympathy. He wanted to grasp the little Polski tight in his arms and rush—rush on away with him! Instead he took one small damp fist and walked him down the hall toward tottering lights and hurrying figures.

III

Stash and Fentree rattled lightly out of Koban Hotel alley, and sped on where the lake gleamed gray across the misty marshes or spurted its lead-blue glitter along the dim shore road. A secret red streak of the dawn-ing day smoldered in the eastern sky. Far ahead the big town loomed in hazy shining. To Stash it seemed like a mysterious celestial city. He wanted to cry; and again, glorious band music seemed rushing through his head.

Fentree grasped his fist and began drumming it on his big sharp knee: "It'll be pretty early when we get home, Stash; but my girls will likely be up—especially if we stop for coffee at Velvar's, and then at the Court House, where I've got to look in. . . . You'll like my girl Andre . . . why—why, Stash! . . ." The boy

had clutched his elbow and dug a shining fair head against Fentree's arm—sobbing. Fentree bounced the young fist harder. . . . And Shabbona Street Bridge began to rumble beneath them.

Crossing the brick square to Vermilion County building, they mounted high into echoing halls; and somewhere out of the surrounding green ocean of tree-tops burst the booming of the Polish Catholic bell for early mass. . . . "For Uncle Jan!" thought Stash in gusts of sweetish anguish that stifled him, "for Uncle Jan!"

Down then into the cool shady street, while the bell rolled on more mellow booming; past sparkling deep lawns; up past the ruins of Walewski's sandstone "castle"; and down the other slope of Wacaser Street hill; coming at last to a square lilac-colored house moored under banking maples.

A small girl of laughing gray-blue eyes met them on the lower porch gallery.

"Hello, Andre," said the lawyer, "here's Stash. I told him he'd like you when you got up—and you seem to be up!"

Andrea laughingly reached for Stash's hand, and got it warmly in hers; and it seemed to him suddenly that he *did* like her. They had started up the black walnut stairway, and Fentree called: "Take Stash up to the cupolo, Andre."

"That's where I'm going to," Andrea called back.

Andrea's mother appeared and asked who Andre's company was.

"It's Stash—the fellow I told you about. . . . His Uncle Jan had some kind of set-to with young Jastrow along in the night—and shot him over their mortgage quarrel. . . . Himself too—through the breast. I

s'pose he thought he was making it square. . . . He was at the end of his rope—no place to take those boys when the Jastrows drove him out. I felt sort of responsible . . . I'd fallen asleep waiting. You take care of Stash this morning—and I'll think out something to do."

His chance had come at last: a chance to do something for one of those Kokan Lake people who had served him so generously. He would figure out some way, he told himself, to take care of Stash.

IV

When Fentree came home at noon he found Stash and Andre and Louise in the "cupolo" play-room, surrounded by paper, brushes and water-colors.

"See, Dad," said Andre, "Stash has made a painting of Koban Lake—with little Savo and him fishing—and you and him driving by."

"Great!" Fentree splendidly overlooked the anomaly of Stash protruding twice in the same landscape. "We'll see next time I go to Koban if his drawing has changed the lake as much as all that."

"But how could it change the lake?" Louise asked in her puzzled younger sister way.

Fentree caught Andre's knowing smile and said: "By hydrostatics." And by some allied statics he wedged three hands into his one, and started for the curving stairway: "Come on; dinner time."

Louise got untangled in order to say rapidly: "Stash has band tunes in his head, and a wild man comes to see him——"

"That *crazy* that the rhyme's about," Andre continued eagerly, "'Loony Bolish drank like a fish——'"

"Let's forget that foolishness," said Fentree, "Boly had a wonderful voice, might have made a great singer."

"And he holds Stash between his knees," Andre ran on, "and asks him if he doesn't remember him. And Stash knows lots of fine people at Koban—Tony Marzak that lets him drive the big milk wagon, and Marika Varika that he says is the prettiest girl there is. . . ."

It was evident to Fentree that Stash had been blustering about his band tunes and his Koban Lake circle. And he wondered at his sudden saddened quiet during dinner.

The little Pole boy was wondering too . . . wondering why he hadn't put brother Varsh in his drawing—big *bratter* Varsh who was always laughing, and carrying him and Savo on his back, or taking their fish off the line for them—red *cut-throat* trout that swam in Koban Lake.

CHAPTER II

I

Fentree took Stash to the hotel for Uncle Jan's funeral, and left him there with his brothers until affairs could be wound up. The estate was in a complicated shape; but Step Walewski, the gaunt master of the family, who had come down from Detroit to take charge, would have none of Fentree's services in the settlement.

In Stash's young mind the drear and terrible night of his Uncle's death had grown vague,—but not so the trip through the early morning dusk to Fentree's house—nor the two days he spent there, sweet as any

dream. Always he longed to get back; and a magic morning arrived when he drove up to the Fentree door on Tony Marzak's milk van. A slick green fedora that Tony had bought him swaggered on his head, and he was ripe with a great plan. This was nothing less than a trip to Koban Lake for those Fentree girls. He had the road-map for it right in his mind.

In the front parlour he found himself facing certain difficulties—the girls' mother to get rid of, for one—and he sat with fedora between his knees making polite talk while waiting for matters to come to a head.

"Dat old Unk Walewski," he muttered hoarsely, "he's bossin' de hotel now. Libusse she's 'fraid of him, but Varsh ain' scared!"

"Isn't Varsh scared?" Louise asked eagerly, as she huddled close to Andre on the divan.

"Varsh swear at him—like . . ." Stash growled picturesquely, but politely omitted raw profanity. "One time when ol' man is sleepin'—Varsh got de dog to lie down on his feet where ol' man gotta stumble over him when he stand up!"

"Did he?" Andre asked eagerly.

"No, but he step on de dog! Dat dog begin to cry—o-o-e-e-e! Unk Step wave his stick at Varsh!"

"And what did Varsh do?" Louise sighed forth her pent excitement.

"Varsh he shake his fist an' say—'We got too many ol' dogs sleepin' roun' here!'"

"Good for Varsh!" Andre exclaimed triumphantly, while Louise beamed on Stash appreciatively. She—he was pleased to notice—saw in him a reflected glory from Varsh's masterfulness.

There was a moment's silence. The room was pleas-

antly dusk with its varnished inside blinds. Mrs. Fentree had left. "Let's go outdoors," said Andre.

Stash sprang up promptly, and they edged out onto the gallery in a body. "Say," he began with an enterprising air, "I gotto go back to Koban pretty soon—an' I can take you dis trip. Wid Tony."

"In that big green-covered wagon!"

"Yessir! I can take you dis trip. I got a road-map to take you in my mind. It's safe."

Andre ignored his tone of patronage, but did not forget.

"Oh, that would be like gipsies!" she exclaimed. They were walking down the alley now towards the back yard. The yellowing bushes and fall wind bright blowing filled them with a moving sense of adventure. Stash explained how they were to meet Tony way off on the main road.

"You know just how to get there sure?" Andre questioned, yielding with delicious slowness.

"You bet-cha!"

"I guess we'll do it," Andre exclaimed softly, "if mother——"

"You bet' not ask Miz Fentree!" Stash nodded sagely.

"I guess maybe you're right," Andre mused, "I'm afraid she might say no—and it's going to be such fun that she'd wonder afterwards why she could ever have told us not to."

"*Fun!* . . ." Stash shot his hands above the green fedora and let them tumble helplessly.

Louise was visibly swerving, and Andre said: "It would be like gipsies—and that! Besides, I want to see Varsh—and the dog!"

Louise laughed in spite of herself and the victory was won.

Stash led them out through the back fence and down the swart paths of the railroad embankment. They saw the green lights of a caboose dwindling spectrally in the calcium brightness of the Autumn morning. Stash paused: "I could take you down over dat ol' railroad bridge—but I got to take you safe."

He plunged briskly across the tracks; crawled under a derrick tender; led on across empty fields; and halted them at last on a mouse-colored wooden bridge: "Dis is w'ere we got to wait!" He sat down under a hazel clump at the bridge head, with a great breath of satisfaction.

Andre wandered back to look down on islands of brown rushes and blue bowls of inverted sky crusted with yellow filigree of poplar and alder leaves. Leaning on the silvering bridge chord, she called: "Oh, Stash, bring your jack-knife! Here's a name you could change to yours with just a little cutting! Come on!"

Stash refused to move. He had no jack-knife, and he had a feeling that Andre knew it! That was why she was calling so persistently. He saw that it was going to be a constant fight to hold his lead of the party.

Andre wandered back: "Well, this is fine! . . . I'm afraid your gipsy man isn't coming!"

Stash cast up his eyes from under the rim of his slick fedora. They were dark eyes—black in contrast with his fair hair.

"Besides—we don't really know what kind of man he is!"

"Tony Marzak!" Stash straightened up, clutching

off his hat in his eagerness to defend his friend: "He's such a man dat . . . he ain' never . . . Savo an' me have him . . . dere ain' no man dat! . . . he buy me dis hat jus' dis morning."

"This morning!" Andre exclaimed mildly. "Isn't that the hat you always had?"

Stash was reduced to a pitiable recourse: "An' dis necktie!"—pointing to a shiny made-up bow of pink flowered design—"it's like what Tony and Andy wears!" His shining head lowered in chagrin, and his clenched fist punched out the slick fedora into the peaked kunio shape worn by Pole section hands.

Louise clutched his arm: "Don't do that, Stash!" Pulling it gently away, she creased it carefully and set it back on his head: "There—that's like Dad wears."

Andre was feeling a certain remorse, and it made her angry to feel that way—when she had done nothing!

Stash sprang to his feet, shouting: "Dat's him—see dat big green wagon—see, dat's Tony—he's comin'!"

The broad brown face was grinning widely; he pretended to be dashing by, but pulled up abruptly beyond the hazel bush. There was room for all four on the broad seat—by discounting a tremendous squeeze. And Autumn adventure furnished liberal discount. Andre pinched Stash's arm: a recognized mode of reconciliation.

Marzak was not the least elated of the four: "Well, dis is nice surprise for me! I never 'spect see you again till Sunday, Stash-a-boy! An' here you got up little party for me!"

"Do you mean to say, Stash," Andre pounced, "that you hadn't told him about meeting us?"

"No—sir!" chuckled Stash. "Wat you tink I make dat map in my head for? I know where he drive every day, an' I gotto make it come out on time!"

Tony pulled out a cigarette, and passed the reins over Andre's head to Stash. They bounced—en quartette—to the bang of the Monhawk railroad tracks; settled squashily together; and caravaned booming on through the Autumn morning, towards the marshes and Koban Lake. Already the lake sent smarting sparkles to their eyes.

Stash had devised a unique diversion. His new hat he punched out in clumsy Polak shape and stretched it over the knee nearest Louise—then stared pensively across the blue glitter of the lake. With gentle stealth she slipped it from his knee and creased it carefully into shape again. Gradually, with deep lunges of his fist, he removed the elegance of her craft and, biting his lips to keep from chuckling, dragged the green wreck over his knee again. After the third salvaging, she put the hat on his head, saying with gentle firmness: "I want you to let it stay that way!" And Stash obeyed; but had to celebrate a humorous triumph, swaying back in a collapse of merriment. He chose to baffle Andre's eager inquiry about the joke, and screwed his dark eyes joyously at Louise.

The old hotel loomed melancholy in its ragged bass-woods, whose crayon-yellow leaves lit the drab and splintered dinginess of the deserted galleries. Brother Varsh was nowhere in sight; and, though Louise begged Stash to stop for him and though Tony offered to pull up, Stash shook his head firmly. He knew that Varsh's verve would sweep the command of the party away from him, just as everything was rolling nicely under his own sway. A pang of lonesome distress for

24 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

Varsh and little Savo shot through his heart, but he muffled it sternly.

They passed on and swung into the Marzak farm, where the chief attraction was a little summer garden right on the roadside. Surrounded by grapevines and sunflowers, with its blue painted chairs and tables, it made a cool bower for summertime. And often enough the neighbors found cool drinks of *Tokaiski* there—and old country weeklies too—*Humoristicke Listy* or old copies of *Slovansky Prehled*. Yes, it was an attractive place in summer. But on this fall day it had the beguiling desolation of some little lost domain.

"Isn't it just as cunning!" Andre exclaimed. "Shall we sweep up?"

"Shall we?" said Louise, almost tenderly, touched by its gipsy forlornness.

"I don' care!" said Stash, scuffling in the musty sweet leaves. He kicked as though he would jerk out that mournful feeling that was sunk in his chest. He could have Varsh and Savo here—he could, he could! . . . But in that way he would lose. . . . He plunged into work, and that mournfulness like a music ebbed away.

Suddenly Andre sat down on one of the clean-swept benches: "What'll we do when we get it all cleaned up?"

"I'll tell you!" grunted Stash, tugging at the big table. "We get Tony's sisters to bring us de cakes."

"Well, but do they know about it?" Andre objected.

"No—but Varika don' either!"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I'm goin' to get him to give us de nice syrup; an' have Jennika an' Marika Varika come over here——"

"Well, I don't know anything about those girls,"

said Andre, "except what Dad tells. They live in an old saloon, don't they?"

"No, sir—you come see!" He pointed across the fields to a mass of box alders.

"But aren't you going to have Varsh and Savo at all?" Andre protested.

Stash hesitated a moment, decided he could put it off a little longer: "I'll see to dat!" he flung back as he struck out across fields.

II

The actuality fell short of Andre's ominous hopes. A cross-roads store with bar in connection, and living rooms behind was not so terrible. But approaching the happiest previsions—little Marika Varika came to them in the musty store room, a person of peach-blow coloring and dark eyes. She stood clasping Stash's hand, pressing and working it in her pleasure over this visit from the two Fentree girls—dazzling them with the mute excitement of her dark eyes.

"Let's go in da saloon, see Varika!" Stash suggested.

"All right!" said Andre in a hushed but eager tone. Somewhere a burst of laughter rocketed up and sizzled out in crackling talk. The little store was redolent of queer smells, like fruit and cheese and oilcloth mingled. Louise, her violet eyes dark with delighted alarm, followed the group led by Stash in his confident creased hat.

Varika's fiery laughing brown eyes greeted them from under eyebrow porches as brown as Praha snuff.

"Staslaf!" he cried, throwing out his arms as if to enunciate some rolling political principle. He did no

such thing. It was merely his generous forensic manner. One great thing about him—he seemed to understand exactly what was expected of him: gathering up bottles and metal table, he plunged out to the latticed pavilion in the rear.

Returning briskly he said: "Well, dat new fam'ly of yours is waitin' out dere for you!" Stash lunged out through the citron fragrant lobby. Nor could it be truly said that his family were waiting for him. They were chattering like purple martins under an eave: Andre and Marika and little Anetka absorbed in each other; while Louise was hanging on the words of Jennika, that lithe older sister with the moody red mouth and troubling black eyes.

Stash was so pleased with his undertaking that he forgot the mourning little song inside of him that had yearned for Varsh and Savo. Lemon leaves from tall creek alders fluttered above their table. Little shadows fled across the floor. The pavilion was meant for days of warmth; yet it made a carefree setting, even to the cold gray deck with the bare circles worn by shuffling feet in that departed time when it was summer.

It was a cap-sheaf to Stash's road-map affair to have Mrs. Varika bring out hot *knedlichek* buns all prickly sweet with *mak* from red field poppies. He was so wrought up now that he could not check the assertiveness that comes on the lone masculine member of a party. He didn't try. He gave it rein; retarded slightly by Jennika's glances, and finally by Andre's cool penetrating voice:

"What do you think!—When I told Stash about Rose Maddon and called her *Rose Madder* for a water-color—he thought she would be red all over!" She produced

a light rippling laugh for purposes of polite derision. It was the first shot of the offensive.

"Dat's de one you make up—ain' no such girl!" Stash protested feebly against the tide of feminine repression now setting against him. He should have been scheming his retreat at that moment.

"Who is she?" Jennika inquired with rising interest, "Rose——"

"Rose Maddon?—She lives down *our street* in the Park House—and—the loveliest dresses!" This from Andre: her words, her manner conveying a subtle impression of intimacy between this Rose of the wonderful dresses and the Misses Fentree of Wacaser Street. Stash began to see that he was being ignored.

"But what *does* she look like?" Marika inquired in her soft swift voice that slurred the h's slightly.

"Like——" Andre hesitated—"like Goldilocks."

"Who's that?" little Anetka timidly inquired.

Andre was shocked at this gap in Anetka's knowledge, and took quick pains to mend it.

"Well, sir!" said Stash, with a flourish of his hoarse treble voice, "Libusse tell me about old svient in Stary Bohemie that have a lot of bears to work for him. Dey like dat ol' man so much—cook his tea an' ever'tink. One day bigga bear Jan try to feed him wid a spoon; but ol' svient say—'You ain't no help, ol' bear Jan, an' I'm goin' to kick you pretty quick, pretty quick!'"

"An' did he kick 'im?" whimpered little Anetka, who couldn't think of helpful bigga bear Jan being kicked without her deep brown eyes smarting.

"I guess he did!" said Stash callously.

The girls joined in shaming him—as if he himself had kicked poor old Jan! And *he* giving the party too!

Louise suddenly grew worried about getting home;

and Andre said stiltedly: "Of course!—he's got us out here and no way fixed to get us home!" Jennika's rankling sweet dark eyes explored him, she whispered huskily: "Just like him!" Only in Marika's eyes was there compassion for Stash as well as big bear Jan.

He sprang up, throwing his iron chair clattering, and retired from the deck with a shake of his fist. "I'll fix it so we can go!" he shouted back.

III

In the mirky little lobby he found his feet lagging. His heart was hammering angrily, flushing waves of misery and humiliation through him. He had tried to do his best. He had set out with a magnificent enterprise. Yet somehow—something told him he had not done his best. It was that little mourning voice in his heart that sighed for Varsh. Why hadn't he brought Varsh along, why hadn't he asked Varsh? For Varsh always knew what to do.

He lagged into the saloon and sat down at an iron table. Sulkiness and shame were eating into his heart as he fumbled idly with a box and dice. Varika, noting his sadness, came across: "For var?—for vy you act—das not a way! Come now, wat you goin' to shake me for?"

He shoved the dice-box into Stash's hand, who sat with grimy fist against his cheek and rakish fedora lugged low over his brow. Looking up into the little Czech's friendly warm eyes, he tried to smile and muttered: "A horse."

"All right!" Varika chuckled, "we throw for a horse, all right! You go ahead—razzle-dazzle!"

Stash rolled the bones carelessly and tossed them

out. They gamboled and teetered to stillness: Double six!

The *hostinets* keeper tried his luck in scrambling haste and threw an ignominious result. "You've got it, you've got it!" he chuckled. "I guess you win dat horse. You're a regular Hanak for horses—wat you goin' to do wid him?"

"I got to fix to take dem home," Stash's eyes rolled up mournfully, "'cause dey said I got 'em here an' couldn' get dem home!"

"Why, you got de horse now!" Varika laughed, spreading his arms forensically, "dat's all dere is to it! I'll trow in de wagon. You wait for me!"

A few moments later Andre, Louise and Stash waved good-bye to the little Varikas under the gray alders.

IV

At the hotel Stash climbed down from the light wagon, pledging the girls to wait with Varika until he could bring out Savo, Varsh and the dog.

Varsh surprised the girls by being rather smaller than they had expected of the fellow who had defied old Walewski. But his voice in its hoarseness, his black darting eyes, his husky mellow laugh, made him seem larger than he was. He occupied himself by teasing the dog gruffly, but when Andre asked him if that was the dog he had put to sleep against Walewski's feet he began chuckling almost deliriously. He shook all over: his eyes danced and laughed, and he seemed altogether the lightest hearted, best natured big brother that ever lived. It made more strange the sudden plunge of his laughing face into shadowy wildness as Walewski came out on the platform. The gaunt figure

with its bony face and reddish Tartarian eyes seemed to stiffen everybody.

Louise had got tiny Savo beside her on the bench, and the little fellow with the white skin drawn too tightly over his cheekbones looked a little frightened, seemed anxious to get back to Varsh.

"Well," said Varika, "I guess we go."

Stash looked longingly from the desolate hotel porch to Varika's wagon. Louise got up to go, giving Savo's hand a last squeeze; and the little fellow began to cry—no knowing why. . . . It was in the air. . . . A sudden gust of wind sent the leaves rushing and banged the lobby doors. Walewski's powerful, melancholy figure was a piece with the Autumn morning, which had reached that stage when morning at a touch—at a sound—at a mere nothing—has changed to afternoon.

"Come ride in wid me!" Varika nodded to Stash.

The boy glanced eagerly at Andre and Louise and sprang ahead. But Walewski, who had drawn near, caught him firmly by the shoulder. . . .

In a flash Varsh had flung himself in front of the bony powerful figure and shouted: "Give him loose of dere!" There was no mellow hoarseness in his voice now, but a rushing anger.

The gaunt man glanced quizzically into the flashing young face, as if debating; his reddish eyes throbbed. With a spring, Varsh struck the big arm savagely from Stash's shoulder. The big man lifted his cane, making it whistle. Varsh took a stiff-legged strut that flung him under the man's chin. He was ready at a sound to spring at Walewski's throat.

"None of dat cane monkey-business, ol' Whaleback!" Varika shouted. "Dat won't pay!"

Great-uncle Step turned toward the galleries, and

Stash hopped into the wagon. He exulted in his deliverance. He could now land the girls on their own step, and round out the great scheme of the day. He might even be asked to stay over night at Fentree's. The thought of the untold fun that would be his made him chuckle greedily.

Varika whipped up the horses and they spun down the road. The road-map trip was reeling to a splendid close. Stash looked back. He saw Varsh holding Savo by the hand and chuckling vaguely, a little lonesomely, then swinging Savo up in his arms to give the little fellow a better look. The big boy's mellow hoarse shout of good-bye came drifting to them, like a wistful echo sighing on the Autumn air. And that sighing song in Stash's heart woke to grieve and sting. He plucked Varika's arm: "I gotto go back!"

"Why, Stash," Andre protested, "you've got to stay over! There's your room you had—and Dad will take us to the Savoy to-night—as sure as anything!"

He hesitated a moment. But words as plain as a guidepost said: "Go back." He shook his head independently: "No, sir—I say good-bye!"

"Say good-bye again to Varsh and Savo!" the girls called to him. He stood in the Autumn dust and sunshine waving to them with his dashing green fedora until they had got too far to be distinguished from road and trees.

CHAPTER III

I

Yet Stash soon came to the big house in town once more. And it was none too soon. The sadness that

had made little Savo cry was a sign of coming fever. Stash had caught it, and fell sick immediately after Fentree brought him home.

Sometimes he cried out about Savo; they dared tell him then nothing of the little fellow's death. But oftenest he called for big Varsh. At times in his delirium he laughed and shouted confidently . . . "Oh, Varsh, say, Varsh!" And then again he whimpered for the big brother, who would always drop anything to help him. . . . "Varsh! . . . Oh, *Varsh!*"

. . . And Varsh came to him! . . . at last. . . . In a dream. . . . Stash was lost in a great black ship filled with music. . . . A terrifying sweet melody aloft in its darkness drove him on! . . . stumbling . . . crying, running on! . . . until at last he was drawn through a bulkhead by a kindly, kingly fisherman. . . . And that smiling kingly fellow—oh! such happiness as Stash had never known!—that fellow was *bratter Varsh*, grown big and splendid! . . . Down on the shining green water he helped him into a small boat and sent him off across the marshes to a gleaming orchard shore, where little Marika Varika waved to him in wistful dimness. . . . He thought often about this dream as he grew better, wondering at its terrible realness and its strange heart-ache that made him want to cry for *bratter Varsh*.

The evening his fever broke, Mrs. Fentree called the news to Fentree, waiting in the dusk outside to hear. . . . The lawyer called loudly "Better? . . . Fine!" for the sake of a dark boyish figure that sprang from the bushes in Shieling's yard across the street—his peaked hat lurching into light at lamp-lit corners. Fentree had called the news aloud to this lurking figure for three evenings, for he felt certain that it was Varsh.

The lawyer made up his mind to solve his perplexities about Stash's future by keeping the dark-eyed boy as his own. To think of letting Stash go again gave him an odd aching feeling, as if he had lost forever his chance to do something fine for those crossroads friends. He hated to admit that the ache was a longing for Stash himself. Yet a realization of this was brought home keenly enough by Marynia Plazarski's unexpected letter. It was mailed from Detroit and read:

" . . . I am so lonely here now I think of that little Savo that died. Thank you for telling me. I know you did all for him. It seems they are all gone forever, because Varsh will go out to be a man soon. And perhaps just that Stash could come to me. I want him. Maybe you say Why?—when you left him? But because—what I hate to tell you—Jan and Boly said I was not, what you say—fit! No good! Why was that,—when it wasn't true? I can never know! . . ."

Fentree knew! He knew that "Old Whaleback" Walewski had written letters to Bolish in prison implying her unfaithfulness. He knew that Jan and Boly had discovered Walewski's duplicity too late—when Boly's heart and mind were already crushed—and Jan could only look back on their old happiness in despair. He saw that Marynia's hand had shaken with the hatred of writing those last words. Strangely enough, his own hand shook as he wrote her—the only thing that could be written—that she should have her boy.

II

To Stash the promise of that trip came like the dawn of his dreams. For ever since a tiny fellow he

had believed that somewhere something strange and glorious was going to happen to him. . . . That in some city of blue streets a wonderful enterprise awaited him. . . . Someone would meet him there . . . smiling dark faces like Uncle Jan's would flash to his. . . . His jumbled boyish brain grew vague. . . . He was only certain that they would go on . . . to some unknown climax of grandeur! It was all confusedly connected with the stories he had heard of the blue Straits City—Detroit—where all had been so happy that the name rung like a song.

Now that light-hearted Bolish was a crazy wanderer; now that proud Jan was dead, and little Savo gone; Stash was about all that was left of those *gay Plazar-skis* to follow a dream of splendor.

And this he would do most surely. The dream might change;—but the enterprise would draw him on to find it—to find it at last.

BOOK TWO: THE DAWN OF SPLENDID EMPRISE

CHAPTER I

I

They clattered down to the station in a hack—Fentree, Stash and Louise,—for there were no street cars on Wacaser in those days. Louise pointed out the woodsiest of the passing lawns as the Park place where Rose Maddon lived. And Stash pictured her again—in spite of himself—as a little girl all pink. The idea excited him. It made a rosy figure to weave into the thronging patterns that the big adventure was bringing him.

A long day in Chicago surfeited him with patterns, however, and he found it good to lounge in the dusky gloom of the Lambert Lines office, where stupendous steamers with great black funnels stood out from all the walls. He wished that Louise wouldn't fall asleep against him, and decided that girls ought not to be taken on trips . . . if they always had to fall asleep. . . . The blazing on of lights woke him up! . . . He saw a man with thin dark head at the ticket window, and pretended that head didn't belong to Fentree, in order to feel excited and alone and that this stranger might turn out to be . . . Mist' Fen! by God!—coming back with the tickets!

Fentree caught the full impact of Stash's flashing dark gaze, and reflected for the fiftieth time that it was these peculiar black eyes under the light hair that had attracted him from the first.

II

Stash clung to Fentree as they surged up the gangway. Smoking men and perfumed women jostled him. In a crash of brass the orchestra began—and Stash trembled with the mystery that seemed sweeping him on into the musical ship of his delirium.

Fentree took them down the gallery deck to watch the breakwater lantern sliding back—back! The misty purple of the Lake drew them on; the chill of late season sounding in the swish-and-toss alongside. Above their heads a majestic thunder towered into the dark of coming night.

Stash felt that the great adventure had begun. Then something happened exactly like his visions of brave encounters. A great burly figure swung Fentree to the cabin window light and coughed out gruffly:

"Fine it is!—Fentree! I thought so!"

"Mac!—McCandlish!" Fentree gripped the big hand.

"How's Durand City? . . . These spunkies yours? . . . Yes, yes. . . . Detroit? Bound back there now . . . myself. . . . Your brother livin' there yet? I never see him. . . . Fact I steer away from such people . . . reason good! . . . when I get in a new line, ticket brokerin', I can face 'em. . . ." His choking voice shuffled on in huge asthmatic volume.

Stash was fascinated by that commanding voice. He felt that he would follow the man anywhere he said,

for great things would be sure to happen. He wondered about those people great Mac was afraid to face. . . . Maybe they were too many for him,—if he had someone to help . . . Stash himself was ready to join—if Fentree would! Fentree was speaking.

“Why don’t you close your poker club, Mac, before the gambling squad closes it for you?”

“I know!—none better! Young Bannerman, that owed the club a long chalk, is spierin’ round to tip the police for a raid, I’m hearin’. I made him mortgage his Elizabeth Street playhouse, and bid it in on forced sale! Bahoo!—now I’ve got it——”

“Run it!” said Fentree, “the Macs have won out in the theatre line before this. Chicago McVickers, you know. . . .”

“I’ve thought of that, Fen!” the great voice rumbled eagerly. “Buildin’s been closed a year. . . . I was in one day. . . . Smelly . . . mice . . . tarnished gold. . . . Had an attraction for me though! . . . Right then!” He glared at Fentree with watery gray eyes which glistened in the cabin lights. “Right then!”

“I’ll look up your new fire ordinances,” said Fentree, “before I go back. And bring round a wild good-natured fellow that ought to know the theatre business—Jack Cardoul—he’s a violin at the Frontenac, I think. Used to play at the Durand Savoy.”

“Do no harm!” McCandlish grunted his thanks. “Bahoo! let’s go in—the we’ans are gettin’ cold.”

III

Before Stash knew what had happened, an enormous warm paw had enveloped his small fist, and big

Mac was leading him and Louise in to the warmth and enameled spaces and dream-like stairways of the gallery cabin. In an instant Stash's liking had sprung to worship. The big man had not spoken a word to him, but Stash looked forward to that event, and practised his good blunt name under his breath as he lay wide awake in his snug upper. . . . "Mac—Mac—Mist' Mac—you betcha, Mist' Mac! . . . dat's right, Mac! . . ."

This practise dispelled his queer night thoughts about the Koban people, and drifted him into the thrumming darkness of floating dreams . . . where Varsh came to him as the kingly fisherman, helping him away from the flaunting sweet music, over the lonesome water, where the marshes spread into Koban Lake.

IV

Stash clattered up the gleaming stairways of the slumberous water palace that had been driving on all night long—all night long. He exulted in the sensation of being half lost in such a palace; yet he was glad to find Fentree waiting for him on deck.

The lake smote his eyes with sparkles. Far off on the glittering horizon he saw a faint trail of smoke. Behind him boomed a grumpy voice:

"Come away, now!—That's only the ghost smoke of the steamer Lady Island that ran on the beach a'burnin'."

Stash turned to look into McCandlish's watery good-natured eyes, and summoning his courage with a rush: "Say, Mac, say—is dere a lady on it!"

Big Mac choked like a throttled bass woodwind—"Taroobahoo!" and invited them huskily to breakfast

with him. "Disjune on me—all three! On me—all three!" This jingling witticism amounted to very little in Louise's estimation, and she wished she dared show him so with a blank absorbed face like Stash did.

After a white-fish breakfast McCandlish took the lad for a look down the *glory hole*. Peering deep into a pit of clashing furnace doors and slice-bars, Stash saw *men*—glaring and gleaming in that furnace cave. His heart quaked with their torture, which seemed to his burning fancy a horror wrapped in red glory.

Somehow he couldn't shake off the sickening queer-ness of it until the crowds gathered on the stairways to pass the stewards' jingling countersign—"Stateroom keys here, please—stateroom keys here, please!"—and, pressed close against McCandlish's huge vest, he felt the rumbling of energetic functions in that bulwark and thought with a chuckle that "Dose are de big engines of him!"

Passing down the dock at last, he looked back at the boat's deserted majesty. "Good-bye, Mist' Boat!" he murmured to himself. "You're de slickest ol' boat I ever travel on, Mist' Boat! . . . goo'bye . . . goo'-bye! . . ."

CHAPTER II

I

The City. . . . After the morning's sleepy train ride Stash found the woodsy Sunday quiet of it like a dream. . . . Detroit. . . .

They said good-bye to big Mac on *Broad Chandos Street*, and Stash watched his dwindling burly figure in sadness. He had schemed up some parting smart-

ness: "Well, Mac, we see you again sometime, I guess! . . ." But a real pang of regret choked off this bluster.

Andrew Fentree's house greeted them with high white walls, a faint smell of Sunday roast, and a clock that ticked "*State—room—keys—here—please!*"—as if they were still steaming on in some high silent ship.

It was a comfort to Stash to find that Louise's Uncle Andrew had a red nose beak like the genial faces on *Slivovice* Liquor calendars. He felt on good terms with him right off; and while he was making the acquaintance of Noll, Arch and Tav, Fentree hurried off to a sombre red brick row on *John R. Street*, where Marynia Plazarski lived.

She turned so sad when she saw him alone that he hurried to explain: "He's here. I didn't bring him along. Talk it over first, I thought." Yet a lump of bitterness rose in his throat. He had hoped things could be adjusted without the transfer; and he found himself incensed with her dark irresponsible prettiness.

"He doesn't seem to be your boy," he spoke with tentative antagonism, "he hasn't your hair—nor chin—his eyes—*they're* dark——"

"Oh, give him!—" she said half whimsically, but sadly—"eyes like me!"

A merry whistling rang in the drab little hall, and an extravagantly slouchy, dark fellow appeared. It was Cardoul, who roomed around the corner and spent his idle time with Marynia. "Hello, Fentree!" he spoke cordially. "It's been a long time, heh?"

The lawyer gripped the thin nervous hand: "Do you know Dunk McCandlish, Jack, that owns the Tunnel theatre?—He's nosing the idea of opening it. If he can get someone to subscribe a few blocks of the-

atre brains, he'd underwrite it, I think. I mentioned you."

"Fine! Where does the artless old muskelunge lurk?"

"I'll fix that up this afternoon. . . .I've got a confession—" turning to Marynia, "—I haven't told Stash anything. And how I'm going to let him know? . . . I could say—'You're going to spend a visit with your——' "

"His *matka!*" she whispered angrily, as if chagrined over how little it could mean. "You think I'm mean to want him now!—as if I wouldn't have kep' them all—if Jan an' Boly hadn't treat me so!—like saying I wasn't fit to have them!—like I could hurt those little boys! . . . why, I donno!—I *don't know!*"

"Why!" snarled Cardoul, his face twitching, "because that old uncle of yours carried talk about you!—Old Walewski! *He wanted you!—thought he could get you and Boly's property he was trustee of . . . his Detroit land!*"

Fentree sprang up: "I'll get the boy . . ." And turning to Cardoul . . . "I'll see McCandlish about that business—on my way back here."

Fentree was as good as his word, and a couple hours later stopped at the *Bois Blanc Club* and left the two children on the brownstone porch while he penetrated to McCandlish's dark quarters in the rear.

II

Stash and Louise stood on the high portico steps, silent before the wonder of falling evening in a great strange town—the delicious alarm of unknown bells and far off waking lights. Absorbed in these marvels,

it was hardly strange that a black-topped wagon failed to startle them, until men began to post the gambling club.

How they got to the sidewalk they scarcely remembered. "*Take the cab to Andrew's!*" Fentree had called as he was hustled by. . . . They scurried across to the club cab stand. . . . But the cabman had been swept along in the raid.

A tremor ran across Louise's lips. Stash saw that in a minute she would be sobbing. He bent to pick up the lines, and the touch of leather thrilled him with a tremendous idea. He would drive to Uncle Andrew's.

He climbed up with such evident skill that Louise smiled up at him with tearful starry eyes. In a scrambling hurry he faked the reins around the whipstock, and leaning way down . . . lifted her somehow to the seat beside him.

She held the box-rail tight and sat back prim and awed. Stash gave a hoarse grunt, and shook out the lines. An echoing *clock-clock* of massive hoofs rolled down the avenue beneath them.

"We turn from down dis street, didn' we?" Stash observed in confident huskiness. "Dis is one de slickes' ol' streets I ever travel!" He wheeled the pair into one of those wide sweeping foyers—lifted to something splendid by the quality of the evening, by the silvery twilight that seemed to explore the lake city with a dying radiance.

"Ah-h-h, you betcha!" muttered Stash—apropos of nothing in particular.

Slowly drifting towards them like black gondolas came swaying carriages that left the memory of inquiring or indifferent stares. Beyond and ever beyond them was the night ocean of green sky deepening to

blue. Dusk was piling up in the courts and angles of great houses; and cropping out here and there were polka dots of pale lemon and lavender, which spun aureoles for themselves—shimmering, shimmering, in the shadows. . . .

Once they were accosted by a strange man at a street corner: "W'ere you goin' there?" He looked like a suspicious case to Stash—who growled to deepen his voice, and shot out hoarsely: "Takin' de horses round to de stable for Tony!"

Its instant success renewed his confidence: "Ah-h-h, you betcha!" he muttered huskily.

Before a spired house of French tourelles they were hailed by a man with two eager little girls in a *dos-a-dos*. The lighted house, the friendly hail of the jolly father, excited hot hopes in Louise's heart. How she longed to stop! . . . But Stash flung off the curt formula with throaty pride: "Drivin' round to de stable for Tony!"

It struck the mark with perfect accuracy. The father subsided, the girls relaxed their eager interest, and the warm lights of the big tourelled château fell behind.

As they floated on Stash drew a breath of elation: for they were surely on that wide street—*Broad Chandos*—that led to Andrew Fentree's. At each crossing avenue gallant marches of friendly lights seemed to fall away to some dusky lake or sea surrounding a carnival island city awaiting actors that never came. Arc lamps gleamed close, and died behind; pianos fluttered bright farewells—tinkled thin—and dimmed away. Suddenly Stash turned to Louise, ready to stammer: "I guess we're lost!" But the dry words stuck

in his throat—for Louise's head was swaying gently towards him. . . . Asleep.

He bit his lip hard and let a hoarse sob escape. The sound of it was so sickening that he jerked the lines and started on, clinging to the notion that he must turn right corners . . . turn right corners. . . . Finding comfort in Louise's company . . . he let his head tilt against her . . . and fell asleep. . . . The horses cruised down the cobbles of a water street, and nosed each other into the lee of an old transit shed for a snooze. . . .

III

Stash opened his eyes to a radiant Autumn morning. The straits—a grand trunk road of sliding blue—made a slop-slapping noise in the piling. A dusky, sailing barge like a monster black bat surged down river, and Stash glimpsed a tiny rusty man on deck pulling down the green port light. Patterns more stirring he had never seen.

Louise awoke and stared amazed. Stash touched her gently and grinned: "It's me!"

"Oh——" Louise smiled wanly, not much reassured.

It took little time for Stash to persuade her to a new plan—"to let dose horses take de head an go home." He began backing and filling, with morning gruffness in his voice.

Out of the lobby-like chill of the dusky water street they climbed, emerging on the shining desert of *Jefferson*. With hypnotic delight Stash watched the complacent pair swing on, twitching heads together at one corner and another for a trifling consultation.

From down in the east, through the pallid shining haze, came traveling the antique clangor of the city

hall clock—chiming seven as Stash and Louise on their derelict cab rolled into a corner livery. The stable man, after looking up Andrew Fentree in the Directory, hopped aboard and drove them to *Broad Chandos*. In the excitement of reunion he slipped away. . . .

Big Noll Fentree, swinging off to work, raised a shout—and the family turned to see Fentree coming at a run! He had been held incommunicado all night, and after his dismissal—for he had easily proved that he was not a club habitue—he had caught the first street car.

He spoke now to Stash with a stern yet tender stress: "I ought to drive round right now to John R. Street—she'll be worrying—your mother, Stash—that you havn't seen in so long—but I know you'll like her fine! . . ."

He clambered to the box, where Stash still sat, and gathered up the reins.

CHAPTER III

I

As they turned the corner of *White Woods* into *John R.* they caught Cardoul leaving his rooming house, and took him aboard. It was just a block and a half farther to Marynia's "furnished upper" flat. And desolate furnishings they were.

Marynia, however, was flushed and vivid in a reve neck frill of fresh white. She gave Cardoul a warning look: "Uncle Step is here!"—then turned to Stash with startled anxious smiles—running through a dozen wistful experiments and quirks of eagerness.

The boy looked at her in dubious wonder; when Fentree said: "Stash, this is——"

"Rynia!" she protested fearfully, as if someone might thrust formality between them.

"You tell—Rynia—" said the lawyer, "how you got Louise safe away when I was ferreted out at the Bois Blanc Club last night."

Stash stood on one desolate leg and then the other: "You tell in dere, w'ile I watch de horses." That pretty, strange person, Rynia, fascinated him as one who owned some control over him; yet something about her face made him sad and wistful and dreary—as did the dark hall.

They left this dark hallway and moved into the room where Uncle Step Walewski stood. His purplish thin face with pointed insolent cheekbones made the room seem cold.

"Can I help you with a hot cup of tea, Uncle Step?" Marynia locked her hands and shivered realistically. The room was in fact a little chill and frowsty with stale tobacco. Walewski pulled out a cigarette and—nodding briefly to her—moved over to the crazed green-tiled grate. He spit the end in the ashes and began deliberately to smoke. Without a word he had taken possession of the room.

Fentree nodded briefly to him; he could easily credit that tremendous iron hulk of a family manager with a careless stern desire for Marynia which would sweep aside anything in order to gain her—and Bolish's property. He had planned such formidable schemes as the Durand Lake-level Canal, and lost in the gamble his string of whaleback freighters—which had given him his name of Old Whaleback.

"And was it so great a story about last night?" Marynia glanced eagerly at Stash.

"Oh, well—I should say!" Fentree exclaimed uneasily. "You see——"

But at this moment the telephone rang and Cardoul called in from the hall—"Fentree—it's you!—fellow with a whiskey throat, I should think."

Fentree was not surprised to catch McCandlish's voice in burly tumult: "Listen, man. . . . I've a chance to cleek onto the *Lady Island* that ran on Cutler's Beach! . . . Consideration? . . . Six ears of flint corn!—Nothing! . . . Hendrie that owns the option is afraid of Old Whaleback that's clubbin' him with some verbal contract threat. . . . What? . . . *He's there now?* . . . Hold him! Make a trap to stay him there till you can get down to Hendrie's shop and show Hendrie how we can lift the thing off his shoulders into a syndicate! . . . And I've got planned a share in it for the little lady of yours that near got lost by me! . . . Your little lady. . . . Old Hendrie bailed me off this morning and I owe it to him too! . . ."

Fentree consulted swiftly with Cardoul, and promised to meet McCandlish in ten minutes. At the stair head he caught a chance to whisper to Marynia—"Hold him twenty minutes if you can!" He sped down the stairs.

But that gaunt family patron left his tea half drunk, remembering suddenly that he had deserted his cane at Prinzep's Bathhouse. He smelled a rat. He could never trust that man Fentree—never since Jan's death.

II

Marynia followed him down to the street, trying desperately to think. . . . She caught sight of Stash

mounted lonesomely on the box, and an inspiration came to her. . . .

Fentree, looking anxiously back at the little group, found it scarfed with blanching Autumn sunshine—and, while he peered to make sure—he saw Marynia spring into the cab like a boy—and Walewski's harsh hulking figure following her!

With eyes beckoning merrily she had said—"Well, come—let Stash drive us to Prinzep's, Uncle Step—and we finish our visit!"

In the close cabined interior she leaned forward eagerly: "It was so good you came! . . . This morning . . . I wanted . . . just a little time alone with you! . . ." Outside a mist in haunting undulations was invading the town; a mere hint of damp chill sighed in the air. Under the unseen driver's impetus the cab was lumbering—rumbling fast. . . . "To talk about those good times way back . . . w'en we were so happy!" Her dark eyes flashed.

Walewski lit a cigarette—with corded, big purple hands: "So you're sick of him at last? . . . Car-doul."

She clenched her hands: "No, it's something different . . . that I'm burning to think about!" she gasped with a white smile; "it's all the fine enemy you've been under your fine way! . . . An' all the ruin you tried to make for me . . . an' all of us you could get . . . Boly, Jan, my boys, that Savo baby! . . . way, way back!" Tears stood in her eyes, tears of blazing fury.

He pressed towards the door: "I'm getting out," he muttered.

"Would you believe!——" she panted hoarsely, "but

I'm going to keep you!" She pulled down the sash and called—"Drive—fast!"

Frowning wearily, he put out one iron hand to take her wrist. But just as his fingers were closing she gave a sharp pivoting gesture that freed it; and the cab lurching at the moment threw him against the seat.

Marynia flashed a look of triumph into his face, laughing: "And that boy—ah, he makes them go—fly! That's probably the kind of boy he is! And that Varsh!—I heard he was too strong for you to run! . . . Not like Jan and Boly! . . . But when I come to think!—" she knitted her brows sternly, fiercely, "—how was it you managed them? . . . Like some trick you are working to-day. . . . Oh, I know your fine dream! . . . To get your fine boat on the Lakes! But what if we fight you till the end comes where there are two men in Jan's and Boly's place! . . . Too strong for you! . . . with . . . maybe with boats of their own! . . ."

"You run on—and run on," said Walewski holding himself upright by the seat, "but before I get through . . . maybe I would have something to leave your boys . . . Something better than your noise about ships and money, maybe . . ."

In his eye, so sunken and careless, yet red—she felt something scheming. . . . Suddenly he launched forward and wrapped his great arms around her. She was crushed against that tobaccoey-rank, doe-skin vest that she had wondered about so many times—what kind of iron it held to last so long. With face crushed under his chin, she could not spring free; could only listen to the rolling of his heart that seemed to thunder the terrible vitality of the man. Yet with all the panting energy in her she could tell him what she

was thinking! It had come to her like a blinding flash that all Cardoul had hinted was true!

"I see now!"—her dark eyes strained back in their sockets to blaze up into his—"about Bolish! . . . Back there *you killed his mind . . . telling him that I wasn't fit!* . . . I tell you now . . . I would grind you! . . ."

Loosing one arm to balance himself, he threw back a crashing kick. The worn door-lock sprang open. She dug her fingers into his clothing. . . . With a wrenching sweep of his left arm he tore her fingers loose, and, clutching the door combing, shot her staggering into the seat. . . . Grasping the luggage rail, he swung to the seat beside Stash and caught the reins away. There was no car-line in sight, and he slashed out at the horses with the lines-end.

Inside Marynia sat staring at her broken finger-nails—or biting above the first knuckles to stop the pain. . . . They were rumbling at last down *River Street* past chandlery shops and foundries . . . rumbling now to a stop. . . . Marynia leaned out into the dank air of a black little street with a scratch of blue water at the end. She heard Stash's hoarse treble call . . . "Mac! . . . Mist' Fen!"

Out of the corner shop a group emerged—McCandlish's burly figure, Fentree, and the flustered but triumphant little chandler. . . . Walewski's gaunt figure was already disappearing up the steep street.

All the way back to *John R. Street* Marynia held Stash's shoulder under her hurt hand. He seemed to understand vaguely that he had been brought here to stay; and, with the late excitement still pounding in his heart, did not feel the lonesomeness of it . . . not until he saw McCandlish and Mister Fen drive off with

the club hack. Then clutching Marynia's wincing hand he called hoarsely, forlornly: "Dere she goes!" The rusty black back of it grew dim. And pointing it out for her, as if she hadn't any eyes of her own, he called with a falling huskiness: "*Dere she goes! . . .*"

CHAPTER IV

I

Stash might have bid good-bye in the same terms to Durand. It receded; and to comfort himself he made a legend of those Durand days and the Detroit arrival. Misty, heroic figures loomed therein; among them Stash.

A letter arrived one day carrying a Durand street number and *H. T. Fentree, Atty. at Law*, in the upper left hand corner. After the exultant pleasure of reading it—with Marynia's help, of course—Stash spread out his paper and made ready to answer.

"Remember dat time—" he muttered aloud.

"But stop yourself," chided Marynia, "and say *that!*"

"That—that—that—that—that!" sputtered Stash, like a bumptious colt turned into a *that* treadmill and making the slats clatter.

"Keep some of those w're you can get them quick," frowned Marynia; "how big and rough he is!—and then gets licked on the corner because he didn' let Lee Luders teach him the only best way to fight that Mel Baxters."

"How'd you know dat?—that!"

"Ho! you told me how you were going to fight that

Mel like Lee taught you—you told me all that till my head hurt. But it was someone else told me how you got beat. You didn't take the trouble someway!" She quirked her head down to see his face, and chuckled.

He dropped his eyes and began painstakingly: "Dear Mister Fen: You remember that time . . ."

II

The next day he submitted himself to Lee Luders' instruction. In a short time Luders established himself as a sort of promoter and staged several exhibitions. These affairs took place on the cinder patch by the school furnace-room door. Big Lee, a light curly-haired Jewish boy with a bland rosy face, looked smilingly on as Stash tore into his opponent, and guided Stash's jerking hot fists into his coat sleeves after the affair was over.

But when one day Stash undertook to avenge the vulgar epithet hurled at young Luders, the Jewish boy threw his arm about Stash's shoulder and walked him away: "You see now it's this way, my boy" (he was two years older): "when a long time ago I make up my mind not pay so small a speck of attention to that, I see that it's wiser because would you have me fight the whole school—nor you could neither, see?" Luders always spoke in endless sentences, his fair curly head always tilting back in good-humored pride.

With a dream of personal prowess to serve, the days passed swiftly. One morning the *John R. Street* maples rang with robins' songs; Stash came home with his coat over his shoulder; and Rynia prepared not without relief to say good-bye to him for a week. He was going to Durand for the vacation.

CHAPTER V

I

It was a wonderful thing to course the sand-duned rim of dark Lake Michigan at dawn, and to catch its first sombre sparkling on a boy's dancing eyes;—and really tremendous to roar at last under the black glass roof of old Shabbona Street Station—where three eager faces gazed up out of the gas-lit gloom: Andre, Mist' Fentree and big Tom Shieling, the old lake master's grandson.

Stash hurried out with them to the dusk gray street, where Louise was waiting in Tom's spring-wagon. Her strange soft kiss was mingled in his dazed, enchanted mind with the smell of Easter hyacinths that Fentree had bought at the dingy flower and candy grotto.

The stoop-shouldered lawyer had bought a big box of chocolates, too, for his contribution to the *vilet* picnic at Varika's place.

It was a magic morning—traveling through dusk, still streets. Tom's noble grim-turned head seemed to Stash the very cut of manliness. He responded exultantly to the big boy's gruff favor, and watched the Park house slide dreaming by with not a thought of little Rose Maddon—who had so stirred his fancy six months ago.

He was trembling with delight when Tom came in to early breakfast, under pale nocturnal gas lamps. The talk ran to the promised *vilet*¹ at Varika's and

¹ Vilet = Picnic.

Stash begged big Tom to come. "'Cause—" he explained, "we want jus' a whole crowd!"

"Tom's a whole crowd!" said Fentree approvingly.

II

By the time Varika drove in with his high black team Stash had enrolled quite a party, including Max Dunrin and the Dalhousie boys. To his mind, though, it was big Tom who put the stamp of grandeur on the affair. Tom was masterful; Tom was a grown-up fellow of sixteen; Tom was something like—something like big Mac! There was a strange thrill in the fall of his big hand on your shoulder and his—"How's that, Stash?"

They rattled past the old hotel with its dreary galleries and stopped at Karshenko's blacksmith shop on the shore road—where Varsh was working.

Stash was surprised to find the big brother not so big as he had once seemed—not nearly as big as Tom Shieling. He was large enough, however, to swing Stash down from the wagon and buffet him around, dancing frenziedly here and there. His coarse voice was just splitting its way into bass like an iron wedge, wheedling and blaring above the noise of dogs, boys and men.

Something in the Pole boy's mad antics made Andre feel like laughing and crying at once. She saw that Stash was embarrassed and resentful, and that between the older boy—so crazy with delight—and the changing Stash there was a difference that had widened since Stash had lived in the city. Varsh's manner blared wide; while something spindling and clever was working out in Stash.

Perhaps Varsh felt this strangeness in Stash. He clucked his tongue a little foolishly and looked about with a distraught air; then darted to the wagon-tail where Tom Shieling sat with a crippled Llewellyn setter across his knees. Varsh snatched the dog into his arms and staggered off dancing; whistling and scuffling the *Stephenie Mazurka* while he pumped Wally's dismayed tail in time to the tune. The dog whined piteously; but Varsh's battered old hat was on the back of his head, and he was inspired. . . . He had just tossed the dog from him, in the midst of a shout of laughter, when Tom Shieling sprang forward and caught the Pole boy's ragged coat collar. . . . "*Abusin' a lame dog!*" He began twisting the collar slowly but grimly. . . .

Gusts of clam-scented wind puffed in and flapped Varsh's old hat . . . and still Stash did not move to help him! He was angry at clumsy old Varsh for getting into trouble with Tom, and yet dismayed by Tom's attack.

Andre cried shrilly: "Tom Shieling!—I'm mad at you—mad—mad—mad!"

"Come quit dis foolishness!" Varika thrust between the two boys and drew them blusteringly towards the wagon.

The mysterious grandeur that had gathered about the dream figure of Varsh of the musical ship had vanished for Stash. Yet he saw Andre looking at Varsh as if he were still just such a figure—something sad, something wild and strange about him.

III

The creek alders made waxy yellow pencilings on the dusky blue above the *hostinets*—that general store,

cream depot and refreshment saloon of Vartek Varika's. On the big *lavitza*, a huge carved bench, were Marika and little Anetka in their fresh white aprons. The *lavitza* was gorgeous with fresh blue paint and vermilion curved edgings, a noble advertisement of the hostinets.

Out on the breezy back pavilion deck the party watched Varika hanging packages of nuts, pineapples and grapes on the branches of a tall brook alder—the *vilet* tree.

A sudden shout of delight arose. The little Bohemian was tying to the highest branches big glossy clusters of *Tokaiski* grapes. His voice wavered down: "Dese are for dose bigger fellows."

"That's w'at I said," Jennika nodded, with a daring flash of her black eyes into Tom's, "—let only the big boys go up so high. If they want to!"

"Well, I think I want to," Tom grinned; and knew in a flash that he had fairly said—"I want to get them for you!"

Jennika flushed; and it was like looking into one of those shells of Grandad Shieling's that held a pink as mysterious as its endless roaring. Just such a roar ran through Tom's head.

Solemn Alois of the blue beard stains came out in his waiter's apron to serve them syrups. He glanced with melancholy appreciation at the pink candelabras of *Tokaiski* grapes floating in the peak of the alder.

Varsh, who had been taking a practise climb at the *vilet* tree, swung over and flung down on the pavilion deck.

"Now see the trouble you've made!" said Andre with friendly impishness; "Tom had to jump when you sprung over, and spilt his syrup on Jennika's dress."

"It don' matter!" flashed Jennika angrily. Tom was trying to wipe it off with his paper napkin. . . .

"Never mind a bit more!" Jennika threw an angry look at Varsh, and impulsively to Tom said: "Here—your syrup's gone—take mine!"

"No!——" Tom was fighting darkly for his dignity.

But Jennika had her own confusion to manage, and flashed out with the dare: "You can put your straw in mine!"

A gleam from Tom's eye promised: "I'll put it through if you will!"

Jennika pursed her bitter-sweet lips redly after a humming bird's sip.

Tom sipped and said: "That's good enough for me!" His challenging eye caught Varsh's—who shook his head with a derisive snort. The boys at Stash's table were passing ribald comment—"Don't blow in it, Tom—don't——"

He sprang across and threatened them with a syrup shampoo. . . . And when he turned back, there sat Varsh in Tom's chair—with a playful doggish spread of the elbows—sipping from Jennika's glass. Every one shouted. Even Jennika delighted in his comical way; tears stood in her dark eyes. She felt as if she were playing with fire, and puckered her moody red lips with mocking delight at Tom.

He had been playing the clumsy bear, he felt, and resolved darkly to continue. He grinned at Varsh, and snatching the glass—poured it over his head.

Angry tears sprang to Varsh's eyes, and he struck out wildly. Tom's arm shot back, grazing Varsh's ear and turning it fiery red. With a hand over that ear Varsh turned away, hiding his face from which the

syrup dripped. Impulsively Jennika sprang over to him, and putting her arm round his shoulder, pressed her handkerchief into his hand. It was the tenderest best that she could do for him

IV

At the climbing of the violet tree. Varsh—all fresh and scoured from the creek—seemed the most exuberant of the eager boys.

Varika had umpired these affairs in *stary* Bohemia, and was reveling in his petty dictatorship. Sandy Bob Dalhousie had embarrassed himself with a large pineapple which he was anxious to deposit in a crotch.

“No, you gotto take it along wid you. An’ don’ try to hide it in your ear! You’re pretty sly, Doctor; but we got sharpened up too—we also drunk some grindstone milk when we was babies!” Even solemn Alois applauded this sally.

Marika and Louise were hugging each other with the absurd ecstasy of girls at a party, and laughing at Bob, who clutched his pineapple like a thing that had betrayed him.

Suddenly Varika gave a roar of dismay. Those on the pavilion deck strained out to see Varsh and Tom struggling in the top of the tree. Varsh was trying to gnaw through the twig that held the rosy balloon of grapes, while he tried to beat off Tom.

“By God, what a monkey work!” Varika groaned. . . . All at once there rose a whimper of horror from the pavilion. The twig had come loose; but Varsh swung out like a figure of crucifixion with the red cluster against his breast. . . . The branches he hung from were crackling. . . . Tom reached out and swung his foot to a toe-hold.

Then began a fiercer struggle. Again and again young Shieling held Varsh in half a clinch; but the Pole boy wrenched away at last and launched himself on swaying branches that lowered him, lurching and clutching, to the ground. . . . With his bruised and dripping prize he ran to Jennika.

Now Tom was on the ground and springing for him. But there was no fear in Varsh when he turned to meet him. . . . To that fiery little queen—that pretty one—he had given the prize! His mouth was bleeding where he had held the stem clenched in his teeth. . . .

Stash felt that he must help now one—now the other! But in his hot heart he was all exultant for Varsh! When he thought Tom's crazy face was hankering right into Varsh's heart—with a snap there!—Varsh was free! But he was too daring, this Varsh, and paused too long to taunt.

Stash couldn't tell how it happened—but suddenly he felt his throat croaking feebly for help! help! Tom had Varsh's head clenched under his arm and was beating mechanically. Varsh's eyes! . . . Stash could not bear it! He flung himself on Tom's back, embarrassing Varika in his struggle to separate the two. The Pole boy lurched to the ground, but picked himself up and started away.

Tom too got his cap and started off. The other boys ran out in front of the *hostinets* like frightened rabbits and watched them down the road.

Varsh was ahead, walking crookedly. Now and then he would stumble a bit and stop. Stash's heart seemed wrenching out of him, pulling him towards Varsh. But something locked his feet.

They wandered back to gather up their vilet prizes.

Later Mrs. Varika served them hot drinks with *knedlice* and a delicious party supper. The oozing bunch of Tokaiski grapes had been left where Jennika threw them in sick fury.

v

As the lights came on, the blight seemed to have lifted from the party, and they played games through the spicy penetralia of the hostinets.

Once as Stash was hiding in the mirky lobby he found Marika huddled in the same dark corner. Suddenly both her hands grasped his shoulder and her voice broke and sang: "Stash, why didn't you go after him? . . . Stash! . . . He—he——"

Stash felt a sudden sob convulsing his throat, and struck her hands down: "I don' wanto play this ol' game any more!" he mumbled, turning with a sudden mournful passion of anger and hot tears to bury his head in the clothes-hung corner.

Marika clutched his hand and pressed it hard against her cheek to beg his forgiveness.

In the balmy Spring dark the party said good-bye, their excited cries diffusing suddenly into the great soft night, where the bulky shape of the *lavitza* showed curved in the starlight.

In his dreams Stash lived over the whole day. And somehow in the confusion his Varsh of the great musical ship came and towered over the smaller Varsh and helped him away. And when Stash ran after . . . crying . . . the two became confused beyond all telling.

BOOK THREE: THE SHADOW OF CASTLE DURAND

CHAPTER I

I

Stash had returned to Detroit. And the plain fact that the busy city had been right here all the time he was absent gave him a feeling of years trooped by and the need to demonstrate his own added mettle. He consulted "old Lee" about jobs.

After listening blandly to Stash's story of great vacation doings, young Luders dug out some newspaper clippings and began at once:

"You see on every one of these which is want ads is a line to say 'boy with wheel wanted'—for which I couldn't get you any position without it, but a Saturday job I got for you if you would get a bike."

Stash tried not to look too delighted, and succeeded only in looking wildly exhilarated.

"A bike is indispensable to you at our place, which is carrying music deliveries from Skretuski's, like resin, rolls, piano covers, Scarlattis, Czernys and many others, see."

"How I going to get a bike?"

"I have that too arranged, that all you need is five dollars, and in good condition at that." Young Luders

contemplated Stash with serene sapphire blue eyes. He seemed to hold Stash's fortunes in the hollow of his hand.

The clipping was shown to his mother that noon, and the great desirability of *boys with bikes* over boys without was set forth.—Not only to employers but to themselves! By the next Saturday he had learned to ride, and was carrying parcels in a news sack on his back.

Lee dabbled at all sorts of instruments; and Stash resolved to let no musical grass grow under his feet. He counted as lost every minute that he was not playing the piccolo under Lee's tutelage, or learning to tongue the bugle under Val Prinzep in *Prinzep's Bath-house*, or trying out a violin, naked of varnish as a new baby, at old Kreuger's shop on Library Street.

Kreuger told them wonderful stories of the Tyrolean Alps and Jacob Stainer, the artist craftsman. He taught them the Tyrolese game of *Fingershangl'n*; at which Stash out-pulled Luders, who was always serene in defeat as in victory.

Two things roused Kreuger's wrath: to have Stash try to yodel in the little shop, and to hear Luders call *de forest horn* a *French horn*.

"A *forest horn*!" he would shout, "how can it be otherwise compared?"

Or—"Stop dot noise, you devil dot could never in a century learn to yodel! Give instead one of your old Polaker folk songs, like dot *Jas and Marynia*!"

And Stash would obligingly sing from Jas's part, pulling out of his steep chest the rushing hoarseness of the great voice that would be his in time.

Cardoul refused to help Stash with the violin. But the old Professor, Jack's father, was quick to offer

himself. The old brown-eyed veteran had followed Jack to Detroit and glided into their life in *John R. Street* like a mournful adroit old beaver.

The old man treated himself to buying Stash's violin. . . . At Kreuger's of course. . . . It was Spring again, and that was a happy afternoon in the old shop. It got dark while they were trying out the lovely slim white beauties that hung on a catgut across the window. And the lights had cropped out like pale bluish daffodils in Library Street; while—wandering home through the humming city evening—they felt Spring stirring in the dusk. . . . Kreuger had promised to finish the violin "extra beautiful—as if it was a *Stainer* even!" Magic pattern of a Spring evening!

Stash was more insatiable than ever for patterns; patterns of bizarre splendor and magnificence, patterns of melancholy and youth's luxurious tragedy, patterns of grotesque humor.

It made a humorous pattern when old Kreuger talked to him and Lee one winter evening about the beautiful music phrase that was so an ecstasy to get. It had been a long time since he and Lee had lounged in the cozy shop; but these cold winter evenings called them back to the balsamy, blanched dust, pungent varnish smells and dry heat, and to old Kreuger's musing talk.

"But the music phrase, mark you, when you get it in mind, den does de magic ewaporate—just leedle by leedle. So it is wid women! Mark you!—my remedy for dem both is not to capture dem!—or if captured, to hear dem seldom!"

Silence for a moment, with Lee smiling serenely from his perch, then Stash's hoarse guffaw. He was fourteen now and his voice was changing. He felt im-

mensely grown up, and it tickled his childish vanity and humor to have Kreuger advise them slyly about women.

Old Kreuger's fine strung nerves resented his hoarse laugh. But what did he care! What did he care about Kreuger and his women, or about anything in fact?

Above all, he longed to use this new unheard-of energy that seemed raging in him, seemed to promise him some adventure of untold glory and passionate harmony—if he could only, only find it.

He cared nothing about his old friends, except the imperturbable Luders. Worst of all, he didn't care about Rynia. He despised her for having let Cardoul hang around so long before she married him, and despised her for having married him.

II

And then a sudden change. It came about through McCandlish's scheme for the Elizabeth Street theatre which had ripened at last. Cardoul saw in this his great opportunity. Even Stash, now a sagacious seventeen, noted how he flung off his shabby indifference and plunged into the scheme of the Tunnel Theatre.

It was a great winter for them all. Big Mac's basooning *taroo-bahoo* was heard in the house, like a wheezy woodwind; while every evening they sat before the chipped green grate and talked the business of stock company and a season of musical comedies.

Just as the new company began to draw, several things happened, among them Cardoul's breakdown. Over-work and drink. And it was now that the change came over Stash. The grandiose lured him less. A craving for winsome, tender patterns returned. Romance dawned for him.

He loved to get in the gallery while it was yet dark throughout the house, and alone—or with Lee beside him—to whistle the wistful tunes of last week's bill. Then would he send his whistle pianissimo to feel out with thin tenderness the dusk eerie corners of the house where plaintive echoes hung. Just as the dusty spar of the spot-light a little later brushed softly about the great cavern. . . . It seemed then that new corners of his soul opened up; and he was hungry for . . . what?

Sometimes, walking home, he asked himself brusquely why he trembled for this unknown something that made up the sweetness of the night—and the stars—and the taunting pretty faces beneath the flaring borders.

III

And now fell the blow of Cardoul's illness and the tragic struggle following. For the *Tunnel* project had failed; Cardoul had returned to the *Frontenac*; and in order to fight the depression that dogged him he surrendered to his old enemy. He drank before the show to key up; and after, to compose his twitching nerves.

Night after night Cardoul would get up and start out; and Stash learned to sleep in his clothes so that he could bound up and follow after. At first stealthily, but later as a recognized move in the elaborate fight Cardoul was conducting. The further he lost, the more finessing he must do.

This he explained in elaborate dictums, on their night walks through the sleeping city. And so was woven into Stash's mind a new set of patterns; arabesques of the midnight town: a dusk land of crossroads avenues, *Dequindre*, *Joseph Campau*, *St. Aubin*, like rumors of

cavalier New France, ending always in a river which seemed to encircle a fabled island of night.

Sometimes Cardoul was reminiscent, and told of his boy playtime in Quebec, Gibraltar, Paris. The sequel to this was apt to be a profound study of a low lighted door, before which he would stand in a trance of stern reproach, until—overcome by astonishment and alarm at finding himself still outside—he would bolt suddenly through.

The fact that Cardoul was so decent made his reliance on Stash the more pitiful. Most astonishing of all, at times his system for finessing the demon seemed to be winning; and they had happy picnics in the Venetian lagoon-land above St. Clair;—when Marynia allowed Cardy *just a little*, and they came home gaily in the fiery serene hour of the evening on a river all sun-spangled and glorious. Rynia at such times sang for them, to Stash's playing, and showed such piercing happiness and hope that Stash, after going to bed, would fumble at his chest as if he would grasp his heart angrily and squeeze it dry of ache. He learned to be compassionate of Cardoul.

When one day, after such an ecstatic evening, Rynia told Stash that he was going to Durand for a few months with Fentree, Cardoul rose with a half whimper of alarm. He had come to rely on Stash. Stash was grieved, too, for he had been proud to help Cardoul; had grown so much straighter and taller in his heart that it had reacted on his loose growing frame and made him walk in that way so glorious to his mother. But she had planned it so; had written Fentree. Somehow she knew that Cardoul was losing, that they were going down together; and she was de-

terminated that Stash should always carry that towering unabashed head.

The morning he left, Lee Luders came around to accompany him to the station. Cardoul had gone out to get his shoes blacked and order the transfer. Stash got Luders into the hall to help him strap his trunk.

Straining at the leather, with a prodigious scowl on his hacked out features, Stash suddenly flashed an aside to his pal: "Keep an eye on Cardy, will you?"

"Yes, I will, though I can't promise very much, depend on me, boy." He slapped Stash's shoulder, his only demonstration of affection. His prominent eyes gleamed a startling blue in the hall dusk.

"Well," said Stash, "that's done!"—and he rushed in suddenly to see Rynia. She was dressed in her prettiest black dress, a rose pinned at her waist. Stash smiled and shrugged—as though he had forgotten what he darted in for. He ran a big hand through his up-flaring hair. In a flash she grasped the hand in hers; and baffled no longer, Stash put both arms round her shoulders and pressed his chin on her head. He had a strange flash of fear that he was not to see her again, and knowing that he mustn't let the lump in his throat choke him, he chuckled: "Little Rynia—only to my shoulder!"

On the street car he and Lee talked over certain schemes that his trip would interrupt. He noted that his mother's hat of rose and blue drew some attention, and knew that she had tried to make herself just her prettiest in his honor.

A springy tingling feeling kept him moving about on the station concourse in the early morning dusk. He wanted to kiss Rynia, but hadn't for several years; so he held his violin case awkwardly between them as

an excuse for not doing it; patted her shoulder roughly and swung himself aboard by the shining hand-rail. Later, through the window, he looked down on the three faces . . . Rynia's very white in the station haze . . . and now slid out into the early fresh sunshine, where spars and funnels marked the course of the blue straits.

CHAPTER II

I

Stash was looking eagerly through the car window for the first glimpse of town. He had watched the Lake Michigan dunes raise shadowy white walls, like mountains on the moon, and wheel away to the north. And now a breeze from shimmering rush beds riffled his hair. . . . The marsh country! . . . With a queer feeling tightening his throat, he saw the dark green marsh flats flying purple under vast cloud shadows, and far off a salmon-colored funnel of a *Ruffross* freighter drudging along its hidden channel.

Straggling meadows, swales and grade crossings . . . factories flanked with steep noon shadows. . . . Durand! . . . The train clanged through rattling brick slots, where its swirling hallway of long steel coaches raised gloomy echoes. . . . *Bang!* . . . *Clang!* over frogs and crossovers. . . . Stash caught up his cap and case, and stood swaying in the vestibule. . . . He felt the power in him to cope with some great enterprise . . . and that it might lie just ahead.

Now in the smirching gloom of old Shabbona Station he saw a face like Fentree's. . . . No!—there he was! Springing down while the train was gliding in.

he rushed forward and caught the lawyer's thin wrist in his big hand.

Fentree laughed off his bewilderment at finding Stash so grown. "I'll have to straighten up," he said, "or you'll head me off."

Stash flushed with the warmth of old memories: "Do the girls still keep at you?"

"About my slump shoulders? Oh, yes. They're nearly as tall as you, Stash. I s'pose"—he cunningly guessed too low—"you weigh hundred thirty-five?"

"Nearer hundred forty-five," Stash replied, swinging his weight along as though he carried a steel spring in each boot. Several turned to look at the reckless featured big boy with the sun-scorched hair.

They swung out into the noon glare.

"I never heard that before!" Stash stopped and threw on his cap.

"That's a lake freighter's bark—a Petrie or Ruffross fantail. They come down here now with ore since the channel's been dredged. We've got a dozen new furnace stoves at the Marantle works and six at Imbrie's. Everything changing."

Another bass *harr* replied with the song that sounds of blue water always and everywhere.

"Hello!" said Fentree. "Looks like Maddon ahead. . . . You won't mind hanging round a minute? I want to speak to him. See the big stack for the *Valley Electric*? That's the new engine house."

Exhilarated by this building rush—now stilled into noon—Stash swung aside down the wooden gangway to the engine house. The huge black stack reclined like a tired monster with maw uplifted. Stash was wheeling under it when a colored flicker caught his eye, and in the black mouth of the stack three feet

above his head he saw a picture that brought the old *Frontenac* stage to him. For it looked as though a fantastic spotlight had cast a black "flood" around a gallant girl figure. She centered, with a flash of blue and scarlet, in the black circle; stooping a little, as though making a whimsical inviting gesture to Stash.

Off came his cap—for a chin rest—: in a flash he whipped out his violin and whirled his bow over in a rattle of minor yearning. Then struck them both behind him with a toss of gruff laughter.

"Doin' the soubrette grand!" he chuckled. "They've got the *black spot* on you!"

She stooped to sketch a little bow, showing tawny gold hair under a hat of green and blue tulle. "I have to bow all the time," she complained; "they said a man could stand up in it!"

"They didn' say it about so little a one as you," Stash tossed another abrupt little laugh, "tryin' to play you ain' the littlest Rose ever! . . . Didn' know I knew your name!"

The pointed chin turned up in mock sternness: "I don't know as I know *you*!"

"Don' you give the hook to the leader man, or there can' be any show. My name's Stashlaf Plazarski."

"Oh-h!—heavenly name! You *know*!—you're the prettiest Polak boy I ever saw!"

Stash screwed up his face disgustedly, and flung off a mocking screech with his bow. "See, I make her talk back at you. I can make her talk patter talk." With a staccato jibber and titter the bow staggered in its scurry but never tripped.

"Now you know what *she* thinks of you," Stash ended with a laugh, "and I'm goin'," and wheeled to run.

"And never let me answer back?" called Rose Maddon.

"She is such a rascal lady that she even talks fresh to me!" Stash flourished the vixenish violin as he ran, "So I say, don' feel bad about that."

"As if I *did*!" trilled Rose Maddon, a little angrily. "Come back, you! you've left your fiddle box!"

The noon watchman, who had wandered around, picked up the case and handed it out. "I saw it laying there like a little coffin," he said, "an' I couldn't think what it was."

Stash grinned sheepishly.

"Don't feel bad over that!" the girl stage-whispered teasingly, as if to triumph over his chagrin.

"As if I did!" he repeated her mocking words, and raced back to Fentree who stood waiting—and smiling.

"I guess I got fresh," said Stash, a little foolishly.

Fentree put a hand on his shoulder in a way that said: "Nothing of the sort."

"I was going to walk up inside that pipe to see how big it was. I looked up! There she was down-stage! So I scraped a string, and she took a bend." He laughed abruptly at the memory and recovered spirits at a bound.

"I hope it was more satisfactory than my talk with her dad—he's a no-compromiser, sure"; and after a pause, "he's bought Colonel Walewski's old castle, where you kids used to play, and fixed it up lately—you'll see—here's a car that goes as far as our place."

They boarded it; and Stash stared with exultant admiration at Maddon's grandiose reclamation of the old "*castle*." He made resolve that he would, *he would* get into that big pink pile somehow! Every foot of

the old grounds had a joyous memory for him: its walnuts, its buckeyes, its rhododendrons and service berries, its sandstone frustum which had made such "elegant" ruins to play in. . . . They ran clanging down Wacaser hill, and Stash saw the old lavender Fentree house moored like a satisfied old canal boat under its bank of top-lofty maples.

II

Lunch was getting cold when they arrived, and Fentree and Stash were accused of loitering.

"Well, I did talk to Maddon . . . but you ought to have seen Stash! He's aching to have me tell."

"Don't want to know!—I seem to guess already," Andre smiled with sparkling gray eyes, "you saw Rose Maddon! Well, tell us, was she pulling her father around to buy things for the big party to-night? . . . like we're going to do with Dad. Only ours won't be Re-splendent! Did you see he's spoiled the old castle ruins? It's to warm that—their party is, I mean."

"And what's ours for?" Stash burst out in sheer pleasure.

"To warm *you*! Unless Rose Maddon got in her bid, and you're going to the Castle to-night."

Stash laughed exultantly: "Wouldn't it be fun to go along that ol' ledge by the windows, and go right in like we used to! Like a ghost."

"Like *you* used to!" Louise smiled. "No one else tried such a foolish thing."

"That must have been three years ago," said Mrs. Fentree, who kept time relations straightened for a

careless family, "when you were fifteen. You haven't told us what you've been doing all this time."

"That's right," said Fentree, "about McCandlish and his theatre scheme—and Andrew . . ."

The very thought of these persons made Stash break into laughter. Luncheon was really over; and, once started, he rushed on with stories of Kreuger and his nervous spasms over Stash's singing, his advice on women and song, of McCandlish and the jokes of the Tunnel theatre company over his queer ways. He imitated his coughing "*taroo-bahoo*" and grumpy swag-ger till Fentree shook. Then stopped abruptly and stared at Fentree as if to ask if he had got too "fresh" again. Reassured, he threw himself back in his chair as if to grip and hold himself quiet there. He looked around smiling, with bronze hair flaring back and dark eyes glowing with the joy of being here.

Andre suddenly ceased laughing; flew across and caught him by the arm: "Come on, you've got to help about your party—it isn't done by Chicago cater-ers."

So Stash threw himself into the business of running about town on orders, of unstacking chairs and tables and stacking them again where they weren't wanted, and executing directions with such fury that Andre invited him pressingly to take a rest, and laughed with Louise behind his back.

III

He stopped in at Fentree's office to hale him home for early supper, and they talked on the way home with such splendid new-found friendliness that Stash developed the heightened feeling that with him was al-

ways the presage of a great night. The evening sunshine slanting down Wacaser Street "dressed" it like the foyer to Adventure. He felt that he might do, well—no one knew what!—to honor the power that was in him: a sort of *royal madness*.

It commenced to have full play right after supper, when Andre tied an apron round his shoulders. Before she knew it he had twitched it about, till it fell like an Inverness cape, and was imitating old Admiral Siebold making his way down Prinzep's Bathhouse hall. The Admiral confessed a *locomotor* affection that made one foot as naughty as a dancer's. Stash had mastered this step, and shot across the kitchen with one foot while he lagged with the other, his chequered Inverness flowing from his shoulders. From this he turned to a dance step that the Deveraux Sisters had taught him "in back" at the *Frontenac*.

Louise's purple eyes under the dark cloud of hair gazed shining admiration: "Oh, Stash, you must be the grandest dancer! I want lots of S. P.'s on my card to-night!"

"You're just crazy," said Andre, "go out and shake this!"

Stash took the table cover and grasped Andre's arm. "Of course I'm crazy! How'd you guess it! Come on with me! There's something I got to tell you—right now!"

Out on the porch he gathered his apron in his hands rather consciously and twisted it as if wringing it out vigorously. Andre wanted to protest or laugh, but listened patiently.

"You see, it's a scheme! Lee Luders say it's no good, and just smiles. But you listen! When I'm playing, or adding figures, I just try to go blind! I

say: 'Let's begin right where we left off last time . . . not climb all over that again, like a mountain that's already built up!' Just zip right off the top that mountain!—before you've got time to think about laggin' up again! D'you see!"

"I think so!" Andre tried not to smile; and in truth something about the idea—or his energy!—thrilled her.

"I thought maybe you'd try it in your music. It's great! Only I had to tell you right then, or I never would have!"

"That's right!—I know what you mean . . . I've just slumped on my music, Stash; but I love to draw. Posters and things, you know. I'll show you some, maybe to-night . . ."

"Sure—right now!" flashed Stash.

So they fairly ran through butler's pantry, dining-room and hall, and perched in a turn of the stairway, where Stash crooned over the pictures she spread before him. There were wash drawings of the dunes, water colors of golden alders on Koban Lake road, and pen sketches of "characters" like old Captain Shieling, the lake master. With Andre's friendly hands flopping the big sheets for him, the clock ticking lazily on the landing, and an air of party expectancy all through the house, Stash was happy as a lord.

The clock began to strike. "Oh, we can't spend another minute!" Andre exclaimed.

"I wish I could send some of these to Miss Prinzep," said Stash; "she draws for money."

"Oh, I'd like that!" said Andre, tying the string and tossing the folio over the rail, as if they were inconsiderable things of which she took no care; and

wondering in the corner of her mind if this Miss Prinzep *was anything!*

From below Louise called, and Andre responded: "King's Ex. Don't be fraptious."

Nonetheless they made it a point to saunter down, and Andre said: "You remember where the rugs are to go, Stash, and get Bob and Charlie Dalhousie to help. And please don't try out the secret process!" she pretended alarm, laughingly. She surveyed the double-decker candle shades of crimson and lime green in the fern-banked dining-room. "It's getting the grandeur smell—like 'chanted gardens," she said. breathing deep.

Stash took an arm of each, like the "juvenile lead," doing a dance, and swung them back into the wide doorway, where he poised to mark time; then swept them forward with a swelling dip to right and left, chanting:

"One to the right—dip! sniff (suitable business) three ahead—dip! sniff!—one to the left—dip! sniff!—that's how we take the grandeur smell!—Sniff!—*Sniff!*—**SNIFF!**" Tremendous bow to the empty room!

"Oh Stash! you make me dizzy!" Louise exclaimed breathlessly, "Are you going to keep this up to-night?"

"Sure! Say, are the Varika girls going to be here?"

Andre and Louise looked at each other.

"I telephoned," said Andre, drawing down the silken brown eyebrows against a faintly aquiline nose, and losing all laughter from her concerned gray eyes, "but I don't know . . . I think Marika'll come. Jennika is so darn haughty, and if she feels the least uncomfortable she shows it with a head on high. I don't think either of them feels very comfortable here."

"*They used to!*" said Stash.

"I know—but Marika's been with her uncle a lot—he's a strange man—Father John, the Polish Catholic that's building the big new church downtown. And Jennika, well—Jennika's 'proud as a black horse' her father says. Why—*we'd* feel uncomfortable at *Rose Maddon's!*"

"I shouldn't!" said Louise, with determination darkening her violet eyes, "and I'm going to get in her crowd so she'll just have to invite me! Just think! she used to play with us before they moved away from the Park House—when we were little."

"I don't care about that," said Andre, "Rose is just as smiley and nice to me as ever. But I'd feel *too* funny—trying to *get in*. . . . There's Bob and Charlie! They're always first arrivals!"

IV

"I see you again, Stash!" Bob Dalhousie declared pompously; but wrung Stash's hand. Stash held it in a grip of steel. There was a moment of panic for him, in which he nearly ruined Bob's hand; but once in the flush of welcoming he found that the royal madness swept others into his stride with fascinating ease. At times, of course, he overshot himself. There were ups and downs.

When Louise introduced him to Ced Morf's sister—Charlotte—while Ced's hand still eagerly clutched his arm—he felt himself indeed the Prince of the Night, and that as such a Prince he could do no wrong.

Then Marika Varika came: and in his elation at finding the happy stars just swimming in her black and gold eyes, old loving memories pumped madness into his heart. He put both hands under her shoulders and

lifted her right off the floor. She was so small that he felt her the same little Marika of Koban Lake, only gloriously prettier; and himself a great grown up brother. . . . Why then should they stare? . . . But they did, and chuckled as at someone drunk. . . . Tucking his arm down through hers, he swung across the room to Andre. Haughtily he would carry it off—his head towering back—his black eyes flashing with supreme good-natured insolence.

He could see the quick effort to retire awkward smiles. He would not consent to be anything less than the Prince—not in the towering humor he was in. Not even when Tom Shieling arrived, and homage greeted him—the only college fellow in the lot, and a head taller than any other man in the rooms. Stash had always had a feeling of half admiration, half repulsion for Shieling; ever since he had beaten Varsh so fearfully. That was a grotesquely terrible memory: for he had not been loyal to Varsh that day. In the lonesome first nights in Detroit it was that memory that he had cried over more bitterly than any other.

v

When cards were over, Andre, at the piano, helped Stash tune his violin, and dancing began. . . . No one dreamed that Stash could play like this. Andre felt a flush burning her cheeks, and bit her lips to keep down the nervous quiver of delight. When he had pulled her out on the porch to tell her his magic idea so solemnly . . . what a crazy boy! . . . she had thought it absurdly delicious. Was he trying to show her now? . . . and succeeding! . . . or was it just to-night's madness, which had blared out so crudely in his

swinging Marika off the floor! That had angered her!

As she calmed to her playing, she realized that Stash's work was far from "finished"—that he covered his lapses with a swashbuckling bravura to rescue him just an instant late from those luxurious dreamy whimperings. Oh, if he only danced as well! . . . And when she came to dance with him it was a sort of disappointment. Clearly, he did well only those things he really wanted to.

Louise, though, was fully satisfied. She wondered if Barbara Imbrie could be as proud of Gus, or Charlotte Morf of Ced. It was a new and touching fervor, this being proud of a big brother.

"Oh, Stash!" she whispered in his ear, "if we could only be having your playing now!"

He chuckled—then burst into a short laugh.

"You needn't laugh!" Louise protested.

"I was just thinking!" said Stash.

A little later his laugh was explained. He drew Marika out on the upper gallery between dances. Down through the black maples street lamps twinkled, and across the depths of his lawn Captain Shieling's windows glowed bright. . . .

"Oh, I could never!" Marika despaired.

Stash chuckled: "You're the only one that can—come on!"

So in through the hall they trooped and down the stairs: and when the next dance began, Stash and Marika floated off—Stash playing, swaying with his violin; Marika catching and twirling him as they floated together; Stash spinning extravagantly at her touch as though he were a musical toy, a singing top. At the close Stash passed his violin to Marika, and with a mellow thin crooning did a passable imitation of the violin,

while Marika bowed with phantom strokes and spun at his touch.

A rattle of applause went round; other jinks were called for; the piano fluttered its confetti bright finale, which dwindled and died away. Refreshments were served, and the fellows crowded out on the front gallery. Ced Morf clapped Stash on the shoulder: "If they have any better entertainers than you and Rika up at Maddon's, they're having fun."

"After we leave here," someone exclaimed, "let's roll up that way and look on. . . . I know a tree, on the side near Hazen's."

"If I got that far, I'd go in!" Stash's hoarse voice boomed.

"Yes, you would."

"Sure I'd go in!—but when I got that far I'd have to dance with Rose."

Several laughed. "I'd like to see you, Stash!" Charlie Dalhousie spoke, half in hope that Stash would take the dare.

"Would easy!" declared Stash, "I'll be back and tell you about it in an hour."

"Go on! Go ahead! 'Sa'boy!" several shouted.

"Sure!" said Stash, and sprang over the railing. He was off up the street, while the others laughed and expostulated with each other: "He won't!" "See if he don't!"

"Will he do it, Tom?" young Delafield asked.

Tom Shieling glanced steadily a moment at the lights across his grandfather Shieling's lawn and responded gruffly: "Shouldn't wonder."

CHAPTER III

I

Stash was swinging up Wacaser Street towards the ridge, springing hotly along in spurts of splendid excitement. He had pledged his word. Of course he meant to do it. The tree was one step. From that to the coping that ran along the upper windows. He must crawl by hanging to that molding until he reached the old stairway well, and there the upper hall would be . . . unless the remodeling had changed all that. His heart beat faster at the thought. But it was too late to change his plan. He must push it through now and in some way win to Rose. He need not plan beyond that—his daring he believed would excuse him in her eyes.

Paper lanterns among the dim clumps and along the curving walks discovered a way to the house, but Stash swerved off from this carnival route towards the dim part of the grounds remembered from old holidays. He came beneath the orange block of the window, and swung up into the tree. His heart was beating now, throbbing joyously as though under the roll of his bow. He wanted to stop long enough to relish the sighing softness of the summer night, and the murmur and splash of laughing voices. . . .

But without hesitation he swung for the stone stringcourse, from which he had hung and slid himself along in the old days. He found it even less fearsome than it had been by daylight, and worked steadily along to the window which should be above the staircase well.

He had a hand on the window ledge and was raising himself, when he heard a shout and a trill of feminine laughter, and then the shuffle of feet on bare stairs. He saw that he must insert himself between the passings of stairway troopers; and, keeping out of sight, lifted himself to a footing on the stone molding while clutching the window embrasure. An oblique view of stairs and landing gave him his bearings;—and with a twist he thrust himself in.

II

There on the landing he paused an instant. The blood drummed in his ears. The floor began to sink with him. . . . Panic now! Not to be thought of!

Down the hall he swung, past several loitering couples, with a brusquerie that admitted of no questioning. His one saving prospect was to keep on the move. Happily the boys weren't all in evening dress, and though several stared at him as if wondering who this fellow was, no overt frowns were aimed his way. And so began his patrol of the more secluded parts of the upper house. Before long he felt that he had acquired the technique of rounding corners with the cavalier hitch and scuffle of ownership.

In the friendly passages of semi-dusk, where clumps of musky dank greeneries scarfed the lights, a grin broke the hard line of his mouth. The mossy smell of these combined with subtly coiling perfume banners and vague savors from some silver-clattering extremity of the house to produce a "grandeur smell," oh, grander by far than that acclaimed by Andrea of the Fentrees.

III

A two-step re-fired his courage. He could have hugged himself when he found a niche between two palm tubs on the gallery above the dancing floor of hall and parlour, where he could watch for Rose Maddon's tawny gold crest to float into view. . . . When it came he saw that a radiance of high happiness seemed to set off her head as had the black spotlight of the morning . . . Or did he imagine this!

His heated fancy followed her about the room. Secure of himself he leaned on the balcony rail and murmured: "What a little beauty; *what a Princess!*" Yet in his heart he knew that he was vamping praise for her, while his real zest was in what he deemed a fitting approval of her beauty as a prelude mainly to his own delicious exploit. The overtones of his dashing Stashiness blurred the theme. Just one person in the world twanged something hot and aching in his heart—little Marika!—who used to cross hands with him, and always wanted him to *beat*.

Before his vision was just a shimmer of lights, faces, and colors like visible perfume, as he swung down the stairs and presented himself at Rose's side. He heard himself like a determined voice through a megaphone: "I've got 'n important message for you, come out on the porch."

Her glance, a little startled, a little laughing, he caught a glimpse of as he turned to lead the way. She followed. He had intended to say something unique and flashing; but this set-speech had been his only recourse at the critical instant. His only feeling now was one of elation that she was following.

Out in a corner against the cool stone balustrade he felt far more possessed of himself.

"What is it?" she asked hurriedly.

"I was afraid maybe you'd think I was fresh this morning. I got to thinkin' about it to-night—and that fiddle that talks to me got to sayin'—'*Go up an' tell her!*'"—He was using the crooning violin voice in which he often talked to that fiddle—mingled with a kind of gruff aggression. . . . "If that's how you feel,' I said, 'I'll go!—but you may be stringin' me!'"

"Just *stringing* you—*terribly!*" said Rose Maddon, with a ring in her voice of decision and of restrained laughter.

"*So I came!*" Stash's voice leapt out in a startling flash of assertion, "*because of course it's my house and I had a right.*"

"*Your house!*"

"Why, my mother told me ol' Whaleback cheated my father to build it. I used to climb all over it—*an' never knew!* So to-night I got from that tree to the side of the wall and slid along till I got to the hall." His voice was less crooning, more aggressive.

"Got in *that* way!—I wondered——"

"Yessir!" said Stash, yielding to the rush of the royal madness, "I caught hold that ledge an' slid along till I could reach up to the window." He heard her catch her breath. "But I knew it would be worth it if I could get in and see you! I been a gallery god before!—but I never saw anything so shinin'—great! like you had a yellow spotlight shinin' round your head! Same as this mornin' it was a black *spot*."

"*That's* what you meant by a *black spot* on me! It sounded like gipsy fortune-telling! But see here!—

I don't understand!—you daring to talk about this belonging to you——”

Her speech ran none too smoothly in her agitated desire to dismiss him and the desire to follow it a little further. “You apologize for your freshness this *morn-ing* when you didn't do much of anything, and——”

“That's 'cause you did the same!”

“And now you break into a house and say it's yours, and—you're worrying about being fresh this morn-ing!” Her breath fluttered excitedly.

“But that's nothing!” said Stash, throwing out his arms . . . chuckling! . . . “*I'm going to dance with you too!*”

Rose Maddon caught in a little breath of astonishment.

“Sure! I want to see how my head would look travelin' in that gold spotlight! . . . of your hair!”

“But you wouldn't see it if you were——!”

“—*Dancin' with you!*” Stash finished her sentence as though she had affirmed his desire.

“You—you!—I don't know what to make of you!” Anger and nervous laughter broke her voice. The sound of that broken chime thrilled Stash.

“Well, I'm givin' you a chance to learn!” he retorted; “this morning you said I was the prettiest Polak boy you ever saw! . . . Ho! I forgot about that when I was feelin' bad about *my* bein' fresh to you! You were safe up in the pipe then! . . . 'Course I knew you said it to make fun!—an' so I come to-night for *revenge!* Make her dance with you!—somethin' said—my fiddle I guess. Just like a play, you see—I dance with the girl in the evenin' that in the mornin' was makin' fun— And then here! it's like a play again—My old uncle Whaleback that owned this house,

and that dad of mine—and now me comin' back like a *ghost* on the night of the big party!" He chuckled again: "But this is different to any play you ever saw—ho—ho!—*did you ever hear of such a one?—*"

"How . . . what?—"

"—The *ghost* ends up by dancin' with the girl! Never one like that before!"

He towered over her, vibrating with laughing resolution. Several dark figures had rushed by their corner: the music had begun: and Stash sketched a quick step in the direction of the light; then whirled back with head held high but hands thrown out: "Please!" Just one word, his manner suddenly swerved from laughing aggression to husky pleading. An instant's pause and—as he saw her half yielding—he slipped his hand through her arm and launched confidently ahead. Rose swayed on beside him: across the veranda terrace; through the double French windows: out on the glistening floor.

IV

The dance was a *schottische*; and Stash cut a poor figure to begin with, for in his impetuosity he rushed it to half-step time. But having caught the proper shading he danced as he had not danced with Andre this night—or even with Marika. Rose's delicate lightness flattered his strength like a fragrance: an exquisite favor to make herself so fleeting on his arm.

He forgot that it was his young vigor that wafted her like a steady following breeze, a breeze as taut as quivering steel. But always he remembered that he was demonstrating the *royal madness*, for its honor and his own. . . . The music ceased like a crystal breaking, and they stepped out as from its shard like

conjured things, and floated back to the dark corner of the stone floored terrace.

"Oh, I wouldn't have known you could dance like that!" Rose Maddon's voice still trembled and broke . . . "I thought it was going to be horrible at first,—but all of a sudden you got on—just on a boat as if we'd boarded it!"

Stash's chuckle could not disguise his husky exultation: "I never danced that before. . . . Saw Max Dunrin staring at me. Thought I was crazy, I guess."

"You know Max?"

"Sure—knew him when I was a little fellow and thought you were red all over."

"Red all—Mercy!"

Stash chuckled: "Andre was playing paints, and said—'I know a girl that's pretty nearly *Rose Maddon*—guess!' An' they guessed you. So I thought you were all kind of pinky-pretty like a fairy story . . . even hair. . . . With a little red star on top!"

"Oh, you added that recently, the star—I can tell by the sound of your voice!"

Stash laughed again.

"Was it Andre Fentree you mean! We used to take music of an old professor, I don't know whatever became of him. That must have been about the time you were there. Because I seem to remember about you . . . your father was . . ."

"Shot? . . . That was Uncle Jan. My real father's somewhere now—where, I don't know; singin' places—crazy, I guess. That's where I get it!" he laughed.

"Oh, that's kind of terrible!" Rose breathed jerkily. She felt somehow touched; and something about his distressing and tragic history made his strong young confidence strange and haunting. She was con-

scious, yes, exultantly conscious of the sensation that she had made in dancing with him. There was about him something forceful that darkened a place for him in her memory. He was . . . not only the ghost out of the past of the big house . . . but the stranger who had swung in out of the night . . . out of a dark of mystery and something terrible, at which he laughed.

She shuddered a little as she touched his sleeve: "I must go in now . . . but tell Mr. Fentree . . . Andre's father . . . that something is working against him. . . . But not where you heard. . . ."

Stash pressed her elbow: "Then see me off—up the stairs, sure!—By the tree."

With a deprecating laugh she assented. They sped across the hall and wound through the crowding group on the stairway. Rose's face flushed proudly under their stares. Just this united her to Stash in a kind of loyalty. Max Dunrin caught Stash's sleeve at the stair-head: "Hello, *Stash!*" Stash gripped his hand a fierce instant and hurried on round the corner. In a flash he was through the window, and as he sunk out of sight called back:

"Goo'bye, *Rose Maddier*, in a shinin' spot!"

She reached for his hand just too late. In spite of the curious stares of two who had just descended the upper flight, she waited till she heard him crashing his way through the tree, and then leaned out to wave an arm. . . . She heard his husky abbreviated "'Bye!" . . . and continued to lean from the window, letting the night trail its nameless cool fragrance across her cheek. . . . To-morrow she would love to dwell on this moment. . . . Like a play . . . just as he had said.

V

A distress mingled with Stash's pride as he swung down the long slope of Wacaser hill. What would she think—that Rose girl—when she learned that he had done it on a bet? The rich blackness of the trees over-arched his mood with something vaulted and sighing, as if an unknown music were whispering there. Like the great vaulted ship of his dreams, it brought memories of Varsh; and a sadness for something neglected weighed on him. Good old Varsh!—he must see him to-morrow. See them all! he determined fiercely—Varsh and Marika's people. And write his mother to-night.

Full of splendid resolves, he sprang up the steps,—and found the fellows round him in a moment. “Had he done it! . . . had he got in! . . . *really danced with her!*”

“It seemed awful like it,” said Stash, “see if they say so to-morrow.”

Alois Shabbata called for Marika; and before she left she made Stash promise to come out to Koban Lake the next morning. His brother Varsh had been having some trouble with Karshenko and hadn't worked for two or three days. “The last time you were here, after you left he moped so. So sure you'll come? . . .”

And when Stash promised, such a thrill wavered through her “Good-night” that anyone but a fellow too conscious of being The Prince of the Night would have felt some quivering presage in it.

CHAPTER IV

I

Riding downtown on the car next morning, Stash found a chance to speak to Fentree of Rose Maddon's impulsive warning:

"Say!—I wanted to tell you what that Rose said last night. . . . Something about you should watch out. . . ." He remembered too late that he was to keep her name dark.

"I see!—" muttered Fentree. Stash noted his new wrinkles and the added sparkle in his iron-gray hair. "Probably the Gorski suit against Valley Electric. I've been trying to settle it out of court—but Maddon and Marantle are solid against it. Have a tip probably that Judge Tragressor is going to throw it their way. But where Rose could catch anything? . . . Perhaps she heard something from Stella Tragressor. . . . She's just spunky enough—Rose—not to love the Marantles, because her father and big Clem Marantle put their heads together to hand her Hugh for a husband—and probably made a big noise putting them together! . . . Rose has always been my good friend—ever since she used to stand on the Park house fence and coohoo to me in her little girl voice. Cabmen and tramp dogs and me!—she liked us great!"

Stash laughed, and glanced at the thin smiling face, with proud pleasure in such a friend as Mister Fen.

"I've been wondering," said the lawyer, "if you'd care to study law in my office this summer. I could fix you up a desk and turn you loose on Kent and

Story. And I'd like to have you—eventually, you know—go in with me . . . I'd—I'd be delighted."

Stash's eyes sparkled. "Great! I want to cut loose from High School anyway. Too old for my class and all."

Fentree smiled at Stash's availing himself of the school quitting point so alertly: "You know it's slow stuff. Terribly slow. And discouraging. . . . There's just one thing:—if you could catch the feeling I've had for years—about doing something for those generous folks—your Koban Lake people—and those here in Durand—like old Gorski;—it would make it a splendid fight for you!"—He straightened his shoulders as he spoke. "But of course my feeling began in peculiar circumstances; and you might find it pretty dull business. You might take to newspaper work, for instance, a lot better. . . . Suppose we cross over to old Hartranft's—you remember Hart—and see if he has anything you'd like to do this summer."

II

So at Fentree's motion they invaded the Czech printing loft; and Stash submitted to the big printer's good-humored scrutiny.

"A long time," said the massive Bohemian, "since I told you and Fentree's girls to hop on my shadow and I'd pull you upstairs. Here you are again, but my shadow wouldn't hang together under such a treatment!"

"Sure—here again!" said Stash, lunging to the point, "and looking for a job this time."

"You won't like it," said Hartranft, in tall tolerance of human nature, "but it's yours!" And just that

simply Stash found himself warped into a summer's job.

"Why didn't you bring along that Andre—and the Little Lady of the Lady Island?" Hartranft had picked up McCandlish's title for Louise.

"The Lady is cumbered with a Black Ward share, I'm afraid," said Fentree. "Hendrie has assessed us and painted and paraffined, and housed in the winches. . . . Five years of puttering! She'll weather another winter nicely, but the money's exhausted again. Mac is interested in his scalping offices in Detroit and Mackinac, and I don't know of anything better we can do than sell out to old Brerton and let him do the coffer-damming and floating! . . .

"Well, be good to Hart, Stash—and I'll see you later."

III

Stash came home to lunch a spendthrift of enthusiasm. Fentree's eyes shone: "You hit the old boy just right!"

Stash laughed at this exultantly: "But he told me after you'd gone that he didn' want me . . . that he took me to please *you*—that he'd do anything for! Just like that!" He chuckled triumphantly.

Fentree first looked pleased, and then frowned: "He needn't have thrown any fits to please me—maybe you'd have got the idea to come into my office to study if he hadn't snapped you up." He scowled whimsically.

"Oh, I'm going to do that anyway," Stash exclaimed, "*nights!* I want to make so much gain Rynia won't know me!—when I get back!"

"Nights!" chided Louise, "where will our fun be then!"

"Don't you worry!" Fentree smiled, "his night work won't have any noticeable effect on that!" He could hardly expect a great deal from Stash's resolution to study at night; and it had been a secret hope in his heart that Stash would throw in his young strength with him. He realized that he felt a sort of property in the boy and had hoped to make him a leader for his people. That somehow seemed *the* fine and noble thing that he had always hoped to do for them! . . . And the chance was sliding by.

CHAPTER V

I

Stash put off his visit to Koban Lake till Sunday; and found the blacksmith Karshenko glooming under the alders at the *hostinets*. . . . Varsh had left him! . . . Gone! . . . He didn't know where. To-morrow he would start off to find him. And Stash—why hadn't he come yesterday?—his brother had expected him all day long!

Marika looked sadly at Stash—standing trim but blank faced before the lavitza. She had been listening to the blacksmith, while the others had slipped away from the vicinity of his gloomy haranguing.

They reappeared presently: Varika with a plunge that took Stash aback in his slack-limbed chagrin. Mrs. Varika greeted him with astonished pleasure, and Jenika flushed with startled delight. Anetka then—a water-lily for pink freshness—looked way up into his

face as if at something far off and magnificent. . . . He had counted on all this, grinning at the prospect; but his grin now was stiff with discomfiture. Why hadn't he come yesterday, when everything would have run to the carefree rush he loved to lead!

"You do look some like Varsh," said Jennika, "only I'd know you never came from round here!" Her blush, with its camellia white creaming round the restless rose, was a challenge of joy and glory. It fluttered an answering quiver in Stash's heart; but again the lonesome desire to have seen Varsh made his pulse go dull.

II

He escaped at last with Marika to the old grape arbor above the creek, where they could sit in the old childish confidence and security.

"You feel worried about Varsh?" she said.

"No!—no!" said Stash, shaking back his head for freedom from that oppression.

"Yes you do," Marika smiled a little sadly.

Stash stared off across the shimmering prairie stillness. Marika's hand caught his. At once the aching lonesomeness burst from his heart.

"Thunder!" He shot out his clenched fist: "Oh, you know then, Rik, I do! But why's it got to bother me when I havn' done anything!" He turned on her a face of angry perplexity.

"Don't be angry! It's 'cause—just you can't forget some little thing—like the way he stumbled on the road that day Tom Shieling had hurt him so."

"I know——" Stash muttered, "I'm thinkin' of that . . . And when he use to help me fish, an' he carried

me roun' on his back—so little that it seems like a little boy he was!" He gruffed a mournful little laugh.

"He *was*!" Marika smiled so that her eyes swam like a falcon's, "only *you* were littler! But it seems now like *you* could have carried *him*!"

"Sure!" Stash laughed gruffly again.

"I know—'cause that's the way I feel about Jennika sometimes. She'll be so glorr'ous an' shining for Varsh—then she'll be mean to him, an' go an' cry! Oh, Stash, I feel so sorry for Jennika sometimes I want to tell somebody. That's the reason I spoke to you about Varsh, 'cause I thought maybe we'd both feel better." She smiled a little, as if apologizing for interfering.

Stash knitted his brows: "Maybe it wasn' good for you in that Notre Dame convent. . . . I couldn' stan\ it there!"

"They wouldn't *have* you there!" Marika twinkled.

They broke out laughing together, and wandered back to the hostinets.

III

After dinner Stash walked with the three girls down to Koban Lake, and rowed them over to the marsh side. Those three girls were like the pink and white water-lilies they found there. Their eyes were on Stash, their gay chatter in his ears. How they laughed at his stories of Porson's Landing and the trips he and Lee Luders had taken up the Detroit in their "home-made catboat."

The lowering sun raised a million crusty twinklings on the lake. The girls wandered some little ways down the road with Stash before he left them. And he would have finished the day in happy conceit with himself if he hadn't fallen in with Karshenko. The

blacksmith began to argue that he had really done nothing—as if Stash could arbitrate the case in his favor and bring Varsh back.

“Varika says we could make a music like a whole *hudba*, an’ by God, we could! W’at fun in the evenings—wid our accordions! Boy, you look like him lots, but you wouldn’t never be such a partner. I been trying to tell you,” he declared angrily, “if you see him—you tell him old Karsh is a damn fool, an’ would let him call him *anything worse*—if he would just a kinda come back!”

CHAPTER VI

I

One morning the Fentree girls insisted on accompanying Stash to the printing office, to see just what kind of bottle-washer he was. The lawns all the way up Wacaser ridge were so sparkling fresh from last night’s coolness that they enjoyed flouting the street car and let it clang by unheeded.

Hartranft swept the paper exchanges from his desk and called the girls to that throne.

“A long time,” he boomed, “since you perched there! You used to favor an old printer guy; but a little notoriety and getting known to all the sailors on the Lakes—*Lady of the Lady Island!*——”

“I’m going to lose my nice title, Mr. Hartranft,” Louise smiled graciously, “but I’m to have a fortune to invest! Anyway, Jimmie Brerton is going to take Captain Brerton down to look it over. There are

some artist people from Detroit want to rent the boat this summer."

Andre underscored this with a gesture of ecstatic envy: "Oh!—wouldn't I like to be on it with them!"

Stash called out: "A lot of artist cockroaches a' crawlin' over it—Mac says!"

"We have no engagement with you!—you're busy," the printer boomed back.

II

A thin little man with sharp eyes webbed in clammy dark wrinkles stepped in confidently and beckoned to Stash!

"Have you decided to come in?" he demanded.

Stash appeared a little confused. Andre shot him a what's-this-you've-been-up-to look.

"Fiddle at the Savoy three nights a week and mats," Stash explained as negligently as he could.

"*Don't you ever do it!*" Louise flashed—and then crimsoned with confusion.

"That's all right!" the little man smiled approvingly at both the girls. There was an effect of extravaganza in his gold-toothed approval that Andre resented with contempt. Turning to Stash, she said swiftly:

"Aren't you going to talk to Dad about it?"

"Sure," said Stash, "I been intending to, but—— That is, I hated to—'cause I wanted to study with him in the evening." The battery of critical eyes nettled him, and he turned suddenly brusque: "I'll see you some other time, Eddie—busy now."

The Savoy man waved his cigar generously at all concerned, and swung about to leave: "Come to me any time, Plazarski. If your try-out's all they talk

about you, we'd have your name on the display boards a week or two. *You'd like that!*"—he nodded to the girls cavalierly, and left.

Stash turned abruptly to Louise: "Why don't you want me to?"

"Because that's where Jack Cardoul played."

Stash's eyes seemed to seek a way back into dark, distressing scenes; then abruptly he threw out a hand: "I can't bother 'bout all that!" he laughed impatiently.

Andre slipped down from the desk: "Playing some Friday night stunts for cheap spending money! It's just ruinous!—isn't it, Mr. Hartranft?" she appealed naïvely. She tried to brush aside her strange impatience, and added: "There's going to be a night sitting on the Gorski case to-night. Dad thinks it will wind it up."

"He needn't expect much from Tragressor. I'll try to get over."

"I know he'd like it! Dad is fighting alone, and he's been working so hard on it. . . . Good-bye, Stash."

"That's the reason I didn't want to speak to him!" Stash called over from the job press, "didn't want to worry him 'bout my business!" He might have added that he wanted to earn more money through that Savoy job, so that he could pay Fentree for keeping him.

"Good-bye!" he muttered. He felt that his conduct had been viewed unjustly. He wasn't crazy about this flashy Eddie Slason! But it was only too natural to him to turn to the theatre to make a little money. Then there was the present he wanted to send his mother;—he had pictured a ten-dollar gold piece wrapped with a bottle of lilac toilet water; Rynia liked perfumes, and he had chuckled to think of her surprise.

But thunder! the fine morning was all clouded over now.

III

As if they felt that they had been too severe on him, the girls showed Stash excess of favor that evening on the way to court. Walking on either side of him, they reached Wacaser Street crest in the gloaming of a red sunset. Far ahead they caught a silver glint of the evening river; and a party of young people on horse-back came clattering along: Hugh and Gwen Marantle, Max Dunrin and Rose Maddon.

Stash's eyes were drawn to Rose, who looked like a lady in a play of ancient days, with the last red flush of the sunset casting a strange richness about her. She smiled and called to the girls; but whether her smile spoke to him he could not tell.

"She carries her head so!" Louise commented a trifle grievously: "money—I s'pose! Anyway that Hugh Marantle is just a stick beside Stash."

"Ho!" Stash laughed, "makin' up for this mornin' yet!"

"Making up for this morning?" flashed Andre.

"Yes, sure!" said Stash grimly, "where you made me look silly before that Eddie fellow."

"I know it was sort of——" Andre hesitated, and laughed.

"Well, I couldn't help thinking of that old Jack Cardoul!—and feeling some bad luck would come to Stash in that same house!" Louise gave him one of those protective looks that glorified the purple eyes and made one forget her false flings of discontent.

Stash felt a queer little pang of gratitude; and as they mounted the broad Court House steps between

fleur-de-lis lamp clusters he thought of the first time that he had entered the building, that early morning when Fentree had taken him in by the hand and notified the sheriff's office of Uncle Jan's and Leo Jastrow's deaths.

The halls were echoing and alive to-night. The sudden growth of the town had swollen court business immensely. On the curving stairway they passed a tall dark man gravely maintaining two companions in portentous laughter. Andre grew tense, as though they were laughing at her father, and whispered: "That's Mr. Marantle—Mr. Maddon's partner."

They passed a great high window where the purple night and twinkling city lights showed *Shabbona* and *Wacaser* meeting in a yellow gore, and drifted on into the court room.

IV

The Judge came out of his chambers, and an absent-minded preparation like the gambit of a game ensued. Then all at once Stash realized that the commanding figure with the lean iron-gray head was Fentree speaking; speaking with a mastery that thrilled Stash and sent icy quivers grizzling along his scalp. He had never realized that Mister Fen could be such a figure! Or what it would be to fight with him! It came on him like a flash, like a revelation. A pang of sick chagrin at his failure to see it all before made him clench his big fists as if he would crush rocks in them. To think that such a man had asked him! Ah, if he only could go in with him! . . .

And he could! Of course he could! He felt the nobility of Fentree's fight for clumsy old Gorski. A prospect of splendid effort unrolled before him. He

saw himself working and fighting with Fentree. Saw Rynia thrilled and happy! It would please her best of anything he could do! He must do it for her, he must do it for that little mother! He could hardly hold himself in his seat; he wanted to take hold now!—to begin right off!

Then came recess, and he understood with a sinking of the heart that the decision would be some time pending. He realized suddenly the vast labor and patience involved. His thoughts flicked back moodily to Slason's offer. . . . If he had had the nerve to close with him he might have been in the *Savoy* pit: right now in its rich riot of sound and excitement; instead of wandering up and down the broad court corridors in a turmoil of uncertainty and discontent. Andre and Louise had gone home; but he had wanted to linger until court resumed. But this talk, and waiting, and echoing laughter, seemed foolish and flat to him. He decided impatiently to go out.

Suddenly at the head of the stairs he saw Hugh Marantle's figure rising, and beside him Rose Maddon. She had scarcely noticed Stash since the night of the dance; and he was passing with head tossed back when she murmured something, and Marantle plucked his sleeve. He wheeled about and pulled off his cap.

"I want to talk to you!" She spoke with that effect of freshness and rosy daring that must either be accepted or rebuffed. Smilingly she nodded Hugh along.

"Did you think I was angry with you?—you hardly ever look my way!" she began with a baffling gay smile.

Stash felt at once that she was bent on routing him—in revenge for his audacious dance bet. He couldn't resist the impudent temptation to bring it to the fore.

"Of course——" he chuckled— "it was awfully fresh my getting that dance on a bet!"

"Why no-o!" she exclaimed, laughing in bright surprise, "of course I knew it was on a bet all the time. I could just see Ced Morf and Gus Imbrie and some of those fellows putting you up to it!"

He couldn't help it—Stash threw back his head and laughed at her daring. There was such provoking, shining humor in her blue eyes, under those extensive lashes.

"Of course," he chuckled, "it wasn' that way at all. I thought of it first—nobody dared me till——"

"Till they saw what wonderful courage you had! Of course!—— I knew how it was, and I wanted to help you; because—because I thought your nerve deserved it! . . . Besides, it was fun to make a sensation. We did, didn't we?"

"Didn' we!" Stash's eyes shone black with the pleasure of it.

Rose Maddon bit in the corner of her lip, and made a note to the effect that it was fun to get him to use words ending in *n't*. Her chin curved up expectantly, and with a deeply considering look she began: "Wouldn't you—wouldn't——"

"Wouldn' I what?" Stash urged her on eagerly.

She was compelled to bite her trembling lip again before continuing: "Wouldn't you think it was sort of—sort of hasty for me to ask you to bring some girl to a little evening dance next Saturday? Because I don't really know you."

"No, sure no!" Stash felt impelled to put her doubts to rest so completely that they could never rouse up again.

"Then you would? . . . I'm asking Gus Imbrie and

Andre. And Ced Morf will be tickled to bring Louise—unless you want to. That's for you to phone me. I really came here to-night——" she lowered her voice in sudden pleading—"half because I thought I'd find you here—because I was afraid you thought I was angry—and I've been wanting to *settle* that. . . . So . . . but here's old Hugh . . . good-bye! It's all right, isn't it?"

Stash could only blurt "Sure!" and nod eagerly. As if it could be anything but all right to have a littlest fairy girl asking him—him! His heart was blockading his throat. He could only blurt "Sure!" and whirl away to hide the madness in his eyes. Else he might have tossed her up to the ceiling—the Princess darling!

v

The darkly humorous smile of Hugh Marantle stuck in Stash's mind. And as he sped downstairs he suffered a doubting reaction to bedevil him: "'Course she didn' come up here to see me! She wants her old dad to win, just like I want Mister Fen; an' so she can have beauty dresses like that! She was playing him around, that's all. But he'd show her—he'd lead her a dance!"

Then there were clothes to darken the issue—if he went at all—— And somehow she had twisted him into a ridiculously eager committal. He must look as good as any of them. If only he had signed with Eddie Slason at first!—without any fiddling worry about what the Fentrees would think, or about having his nights to put in at Fentree's office, studying! What did he want of *studying*? Besides, what good would that do *Fentree*? Fentree hadn't any need of *him*! And he hadn't promised Rynia to study with Mist' Fen!

. . . Submitting himself to these justifications with half a heart, while the other half shivered to the luring melody prefigured in Rose Maddon, he swung on past the half demolished ruin of the old Polish Catholic Church and the new office building where Fentree hoped to locate.

VI

At home he found Andre and Louise in a state of rapturous excitement. Andre had got word from Miss Prinzep about her drawings. But the main thing was, that she was one of that party of artist cockroaches that were renting the *Lady Island* for several weeks to paint and sketch the dune and marsh country, and Andre and Louise were to go over in Jim Brerton's car to visit them.

"That'll be great!" Stash agreed rather lamely. It would cut right across the Maddon date. He took Andre aside to explain.

She nodded seriously: "Of course Louise would be crazy to go. But she'll be asked to stay over on the *Lady Island*, and she'll be sort of lady of honor. Why don't you ask Marika! She must get lonesome sometimes. We haven't any of us been out there for over two weeks."

Something in Stash's heart leapt warmly to this suggestion. So early the next morning he called Varika's on the telephone, and commenced to make excuses for not coming out to see her—in order to break his delightful surprise the more effectively. But Marika had been so hurt by his neglect that she resented his eagerness as condescension, and refused abruptly. He was so taken aback that he could utter no protest, and after

waiting for her to say something more—spoke a brusque good-bye.

Bewildered and angry, he told Andre, who quickly adopted the alternative: "I'll tell Louise, so that she can come back with Jim and Captain Brerton if she wants."

The dark haired younger sister was ecstatic over such a prospect. "Oh—Stash." She gave his arm a swing, which he continued round and round, as though Louise had succeeded—after the pitiful failure of other inventors—in establishing perpetual motion. She had to catch and stop it for him; and he started off downtown with spring in his step.

VII

During the day, however, he brooded over Marika's refusal. He had almost decided to walk out to Varika's that night; but if he could set things right with her—wouldn't she then expect him to ask her again to go to Maddon's with him? It would be awkward to explain, and Stash hated to face awkward situations. He preferred to cherish the fanciful feeling that something would yet draw him out there.

On his Shabbona Street *ad* collecting route he met Eddie Slason and abruptly decided to sign up for the job, which tempted him now more strongly than ever.

"Come at seven to-night and sit in with the orchestra; we'll try you out for some variety stuff some time Sunday."

And so Stash decided to give up seeing Marika till after the dance at Maddon's on the Hill. His elation in closing with Slason muffled his doubts like a drum roll. A dashing appearance at the Maddons' was guar-

anted. Louise would be proud to have him look like the other fellows. Even though she would grieve to know him hypothecating his expectations at the *Savoy*. That was the inconsistency of girls. They wanted you *not* to do so-and-so when you just had to do it in order to satisfy their demands in other matters!

He was feeling fairly justified now in all his decisions. There was just a dull shadowing fear that he had played the traitor to his big resolution of Court night . . . and a little to Fentree's expectations . . . and to Rynia's hopes for him.

CHAPTER VII

I

It was a windy, wild night when Louise returned from her day on the *Lady Island*. All wrapped up in her gray-pink evening coat, she boarded the street car with Stash, feeling a certain chagrin in taking the dingy common "trolley" to Maddon's gates. Not that this could very much dampen her elation. And in the end Stash proved himself equal to effecting a proud and disdainful entrance of the carriage canopy.

Perhaps there was a shade too much of dash in his manner; and for this Louise was partly to blame, since Stash had been inspired from the moment he saw her on the Fentree stairs with the belief that he was taking the very prettiest girl of the evening.

He had no difficulty in getting her program scored off. He signed his own slashing *S. P.* twice on Rose Maddon's card, against her protest. But in her danc-

ing cornflower eyes he thought he saw a delight in his charge, his esprit.

There was nothing to slur the splendor of the evening, unless it was those untimely thoughts of Marika. . . . Poor li'l Rika—what was twisting her! A queer thing—he often pictured her as crying when he had really left her smiling!

Yet none of this disturbed him greatly as he stood out by the stone balustrade, talking and laughing with Dunrin and Hugh Marantle. . . . Hugh had taken three dances with Louise. . . . And when—on the way home through the windy dark—Louise told him that it had all turned out more beautifully than she had expected, Stash was fully satisfied with himself and Louise and the exhilarating wildness of the night. Below them Wacaser Street drooped away with dripping purplish jewels in place of arc lamps. Above them the maples softly roared or towered into clashing sound.

“Hear it!” Louise exclaimed, “way up in the pilot houses of them!” She lingered on the porch to look back.

Stash laughed, patted her shoulder, and swung off up to his room.

II

From his room, which was on the alley side of the house, Stash heard an owl. It came so dismal and loud that he leaned out of the half open window to listen. He had heard such wild, old Bohemian wives' tales about the hooting of owls round certain houses and the death and trouble that followed that the fear of the sound was ingrained in him.

It came now so close beneath his head that it startled

108 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

him. He made a low gruff noise to frighten it away, when suddenly someone spoke: "*You, Stash-a-boy?*" Somehow he knew at once that it must be Varsh; muttered "wait a minute" and slipping through the hall out onto the gallery, let himself down a post into the alley.

Everything was silent except for the crunching of his feet and the gurgle of a gutter runnel. The black mist whiffed against his hot forehead. Backed against the syringa bush was a dark figure in a peaked hat. Its silence gave Stash a qualm of alarm. Perhaps it wasn't Varsh after all. This alley wasn't a nice place to meet . . . "That you, Varsh?"

"Sure . . . I didn' know it was you, Stash-a-boy! . . . You look so big dere comin' down."

He seemed ill at ease; and Stash laughed a little nervously, then turned brusque: "Why didn' you let me know you was round, before?"

"I just got in last night on dat Mon'ak Route—ridin' freights to get here—my God, boy, I don' want to bother you, get back! I just was a hangin' round to see you in de mornin'—an' den I see your head up dere in dat win'ow." His voice sounded bleak and tired. Something told Stash that he ought to say: "Come on up an' talk a while, an' I'll fix you up for the night."

Various ways of presenting such an offer started up in his mind; but something balked his usual impetuosity. Something dull, dispiriting and ugly had come with the tragic hooting of that owl to poison the glamour of the evening. He resented it fiercely. This old rough fellow had dragged him down from those heights of passionate glory he had always longed for—and was beginning to attain!

"Well——" he paused suggestively.

"Well, boy!" Varsh struck a bolder tone as if to

bolster his shuffling unwelcome position before this little Stash—grown all big and making so straight a figure in the sifting mist and down drifting light. “I been all over—lots o’ places—an’ I could tell you about it—but dis ain’ no time, I see. So all I wanto know is—I heard dat ol’ Karsh out huntin’ me, want me back. And if he wants me now do you know, boy?”

So much in the voice and the manner was an echo of his own that it served to stress Stash’s disgust with the situation. But at the same time a pang for Varsh’s bleakness wrangled lonesomely in the backland of his mind; and an impulse made him thrust out his hand and grip Varsh’s as he said: “Old Karsh! . . . He said you could call him any damn name you want to, if you’d just come back! . . . He’s off now, hunting—way South——”

“That’s where I been,” said Varsh hoarsely, “an’ I heard in a saloon at Munc’—so I’m gettin’ me back.”

He swung out—hesitated a moment—then, as Stash said nothing, lunged out into the wind and black mist. There had been in his last words a hoarseness, it seemed to Stash, as of choked back tears—or was it merely some futile sort of anger? He could not believe his first impression or that an appeal had been made to him—because Varsh seemed to him a grown man, bigger and older than he.

By aid of the mock orange bush he climbed back to the upper gallery, and tried to softly close the French door of the hall against the gust of the wind, which roared and sighed like the dreary rumors of his old marsh country memories

CHAPTER VIII

I

The morning cleared bright and glistening, and Stash struck out across the back fields for the Koban Lake road. He crossed the railroad bridge, which he had once on a time made a virtue of avoiding because he had two little girls with him. He laughed to himself. A stubby Slovak track-walker carrying a spectral lantern glanced after the big swinging boy with the crazy smile on his face.

The first brazen glimmer of Koban Lake flicked his eye. In a hedge of Koban woods a cat bird called, breaking the stillness with a thin spectral gleam of sound, as if—like the track-walker's lantern—it hardly knew in its cool dark covert that morning was rising high.

Something broke with a rush through Stash's heart and he found himself whistling merry, wheedling little songs from "The Glittering Road" and "Till Tomorrow Morning." Transported from the freshness of the July country morning, he smelt the mirky fragrance of the old Tunnel theatre, and heard sounds and words and voices that fell into semi-patterns like the colored flecks of a kaleidoscope.

He heard Cardoul's voice quoting from "The Mikado"—"She has an elbow you'd go miles to see!" In a flash he saw an elbow like Rose Maddon's, with a dimple that came and went as you saw it in backward view. In another flash he heard her speak: "You say my elbow winked at you?—that's 'cause you took a backward view!"

And now he transferred those fancied words to Rudolphine Mar of the *Savoy*. It might fit into their specialty for next Saturday afternoon. . . . A few snappy lines to be scored up with the musical setting by old Scarbro. Scarbro, the old leader, could take a few tags from old songs and write a harmony overnight to fit any song poem you could hand him. Great stuff! Stash felt it in himself to do this some day.

But now to turn his inward ear to Rudolphine Mar, and try to hear her saucy little voice . . . it *would* get tangled up with Rose's. Hold on!—another idea! He would first snap off the patter on his violin, making it say as plainly as he could: "I say that dimple in your elbow winked at me!"

Then Rudolphine's childish silver voice: "The dimple in my elbow winked at you?—that's 'cause you took a backward view! I think it just was laughin' up its sleeve—to see what it can make some chaps believe!" There!—a dandy parlando bit for her. He'd trust to a mood of royal madness to shape these fragments into a pattern.

Marika could help him! He'd ask her: "Say, Rik, can you give me a hand with my *Savoy* combination?" And he could see her black and gold flecked eyes drop their sombre questioning and take fire with eagerness to help. He could so easily picture himself repairing his injustice to Rika and Varsh that he felt it already accomplished. It was part of his stagey facility for visioning splendid exploits.

II

Such pictures were tumbling through his fiery mind when Varika met him with paper in hand, talking ex-

citedly of the great Vladika who had just come over from Bohemia to re-fire them here in America with the dream of making their romantic homeland the stronghold of Slavic liberty—*Swoboda!*¹ Always their *swoboda!* As for himself, Stash would like to forget it; and learn where Rika was. So that he could tell her his *Savoy* scheme, which Varika's chatter was simply jostling out of his mind! . . .

"Let's see!" he thought to himself grimly, "I think it just was laughin' up its sleeve—darn it! the voice would turn into Rose Maddon's" . . . So his thoughts ran on while he smiled blankly in Varika's face.

"*Dat's what's de matter!*" shouted the little Czech, "*dat we have in dis country too much comfort. . . . You forget too, you Polish . . .*"

"Le' me see!" thought Stash, "I come in as a press agent. . . ."

"*An' sometime we was together in one great country, speak de same language—you Polish an' us. Us Czechs . . .*"

"*When she says,*" Stash thought on fiercely, facing the little man squarely, determinedly, "*she'd like to hear my fiddle—I say . . .*"

"*Us Czechs has de sounder heads. We don't go crazy about swoboda! . . .*"

"*Yes you don't!*" thought Stash in a sarcastic flirt of temporary attention, and resumed his own scheming. . . .

"*De Czechs lights up like lanterns,*" Varika ran on, "*but de Polish like a torch. Dat Father Jan, he thinks he give up de old dreams about swoboda, but he's still a-burnin' out inside. Dat's such a pitiful condition dat only Marika can pull dat uncle priest out of his spells.*"

¹ Swoboda = Liberty.

I say—Give up all dat priest's tomfoolishness!——”

“*You don't say dat to him!*”—a great voice shouted so suddenly that Varika sprang about as if struck with a baseball club. It was one of the Shabbata boys to be sure: they were always passing by and joining right in your talk, without even saying “By God, dat's right!” for politeness.

“Well, I don't say it to him of course, but I tell Marika dat, when she goes to play for him.”

Shabbata nodded: “Well, dat's safe!”

Varika ignored this fling. “I been tellin' Stash about dis in Hartranft's paper—about Vladika comin' over . . .”

“Yes!” boomed Stash, “*and I set it all up in Hart-ranft's shop, so I know it by letters!* . . . What I'm waitin' for is to hear where Rika is!” The laughing twinkle in his eye set off Shabbata in a roar. Varika started back!—as if he had been clubbed on the other ear! Then joined the roar at his expense.

Stash swung away laughing through the citron smelling lobby; and out on the pavilion deck found Marika. They wound on down the low and sand-bridged river together.

III

“You know,” said Stash, “what gave me the idea about the fiddle talkin' patter? A fellow at the Majestic in Detroit was showin' how to do mouth reading. It was s'prising! But I thought—‘Gee! I can make my fiddle say things as plain as that!’ Ever see it done?—I mean mouth reading?”

Marika shook her head, smiling up at him with almost the shine of tears in her eyes for the happiness

114 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

of having him ignore the wrong she had done him!—refusing last night's pleasure.

"Well," said Stash, "I'll try you on an easy one!"—and mouthed fiercely at her.

"I—I guess you mean—'You lie!' "

"That's right!" mouthed Stash.

"That's right," guessed Marika.

"Now——" said Stash aloud—"we'll try a longer one. . . ."

A flush stole up over the childish curve of her cheek. It should have made Stash ashamed of the rascally shining of his eyes.

"You——" began Marika, "you——"

"Got to say it right out!" said Stash.

"*I love you*," said Marika, trying to match his laugh, but faltering, while the pink deepened in her cheeks.

"That's right," Stash chuckled, "ho—ho! You made such a fuss over it! Why, in rehearsals you'll hear 'em say—'Put more snap in that love stuff!' *It don' mean anything!*"

"Yes, sure," said Marika, dropping her head, "you're used to it. But—" she brought her eyes to his and flashed them a little angrily—"you did it just like laying a trap for me!"

"I never meant it," Stash swore; "it just came to me all of a sudden. An' I couldn' help grinning, Rik, when you waited and sputtered! . . ."

"Just like a trap!" Marika repeated, turning her face aside with a half laugh, half sob. She was miserably angry with him, and yet wanted to laugh and cry her thankfulness to him for coming to her so gay. And didn't she just long to tell him how awful she had felt during these last days? . . . And still . . . he took

such advantage of her weakness . . . and she was angry!

Stash caught the shine of her eyes, saw the quiver in her throat; and went on a way in silence. In the still shining of the morning they came to an old harvest apple tree. Fallen green globules lay in the rain-beaded grass.

"'Member how we used to throw these on sticks?" said Stash. He picked up a small one and fitted it to the knuckles of his big hand: "I s'pose I could throw this as far now without a stick. Want to watch it curve, Rik?"

Of course she exclaimed excitedly, admiringly. "Throw this one straight up, so that I can see it get lost in the sky," she begged for the next one.

With a tremendous wrench of the shoulders Stash set the green globe free. She watched its glossy surface catch the blue light and melt from vision, like a green soapbubble crackling in a blue pool.

Marika gathered more. "Throw these!" she laughed gaily. It was just like they had been as little things. Stash was tumultuously happy to be just like kids again with Rika, and even inclined to brag as in the old days—when he didn't know any better.

"Lee Luders wanted me to make the Cadillacs this summer. We used to fizz 'em over on the back lots. But when I got to puttin' on the *break* stuff he backed away—just like a Sheenie, I told him. But never mind, he said, he'd get a cage. He said a Sheenie's head was thinner by inches than a Polak's and needed protection. Just a joke. But maybe it is. Your pop said the Polaks don't have so good heads as the Czechs. He's all excited about *swoboda* again. I have to laugh!"

Marika flashed up: "I don't see it's to laugh about!

I'm sad to see him when he feels all his dreams are gone. I like to see him tear around talking about old Bohemia and swoboda, because isn't it fine to live for that? Sometimes I see him get melancholy and look at the old blue lavitza bench, and he smokes and thinks and thinks—and that's not good. That's like Uncle John, and I couldn't stand that."

"Well, you can't bother 'bout all that, or it makes you sick. I told you all that stuff bothers me too—like about Varsh. But I just can' bother 'bout it all the time!"

"But you bothered 'bout me, Stash!" Marika's voice trembled and her eyes were shining. "You came and never said a word about last night!—and all just like I hadn't acted mean—so mean!—just as if—" she threw out her arms—"it never was!"

To her he looked like the proud young hawk, eyes shining, but still puzzled a bit just how to receive her.

"And I've been so sick ever since the minute after I put up the phone," she mourned softly.

"But it's all right now!" declared Stash, triumphant, and he began to whistle thrillingly.

"What's that you're whistling?"

"*'Back to the Boulevards!'*"

"You know, Stash!" she caught his arm impulsively, "that's just it! Back to the Boulevards—you'll be going! To that Detroit! To that excitement! And you'll leave me—and all of us! Because I knew—because I felt it!—that's why I acted that way!—because you didn't come to see us—and I thought—*let it end now!*"

"I know, Rik—there's so much exciting to do! And I feel about you and Varsh an' all of this, here, like I do about a piano. Something way back in the old

hotel about a piano happened that makes me feel queer, right up against one. To keep from feeling sick I just bang into it—an' into excitement. And ten to one the thing I'm lovin' hardest makes me sickest. But I can' be bothered——" He rubbed his hand across his forehead—"I guess my old thick head, like Lee Luders says, can' stand too much thinkin'! You'll come an' see me in my skit at the Savoy, won't you? And I'll make my lady fiddle talk over their heads to you, Rika!"

"Oh, that will be *fun*, Stash!"

"What will I say?" he asked.

"Oh, something like this——" and hummed—"Oh, *What Full Delight!*"

"That's too easy!" chuckled Stash. "I'll say on that old fid——" and mouthed—"I love you!"—Adding: "But you'll know it'll mean nothing, just nothing in the world."

Then as she pretended to look away angrily, he exclaimed: "There's your pop on the lavitza now—let's do a little sketch to make him forget swobodie!"

He took her arm, and they trotted out under the twinkling alders on the rain-packed ground. Varika was smoking at ease on the red and blue curlicued bench.

"We'll do a squeegee," whispered Stash; "throw up one foot in the air, and squeegee the other, so we travel sideways together."

And so they moved out uncannily in front of Varika's bench. What an astonishment on his face! He caught Marika as she stumbled, and drew her tight to him, under the curve of his big porcelain pipe with the painted hunting scene on its bowl.

IV

Stash looked on gaily, springing his weight from one foot to the other, and wondering why he could ever stay away from so happy a place.

Marika looked up at the roof of leaves: "See Tasich's blue smoke in the green, like your green apple would, Stash, in the blue."

And Stash noted—what she could not see—that under her tilted-up chin was a sheen of blue in white, where the delicate veins throbbed.

He winked at her: "It'll mean just nothin', Rik, just nothin' in the world." And he knew that nothing, nothing in the world, could ever be so happy for him as just these Sunday morning moments under the big alders, in the bluish shade.

"What you mean?" Varika demanded.

"Just a secret, *Tasich*!" Marika whipped his big brown hand with her little one.

"Oh—go on wid your secrets! When you go *tasich'n* me you're just putting honey on oil—dat's all!"

The road for a short distance up was a tunnel of shade, and echoing voices sounded there for a few moments before Varsh and Jennika came into view, with Karshenko's big gipsy king figure swinging beside them.

They were laughing together, Jennika's face flushed with amusement and angry expostulation with the swaggering blacksmith. Varsh looked like a new fellow, though he compared somehow ill with Stash's clean-cut figure. This clouded Jennika's happiness. Her humid eyes flashed from Varsh to Stash and Ma-

¹ Tasich = Daddy.

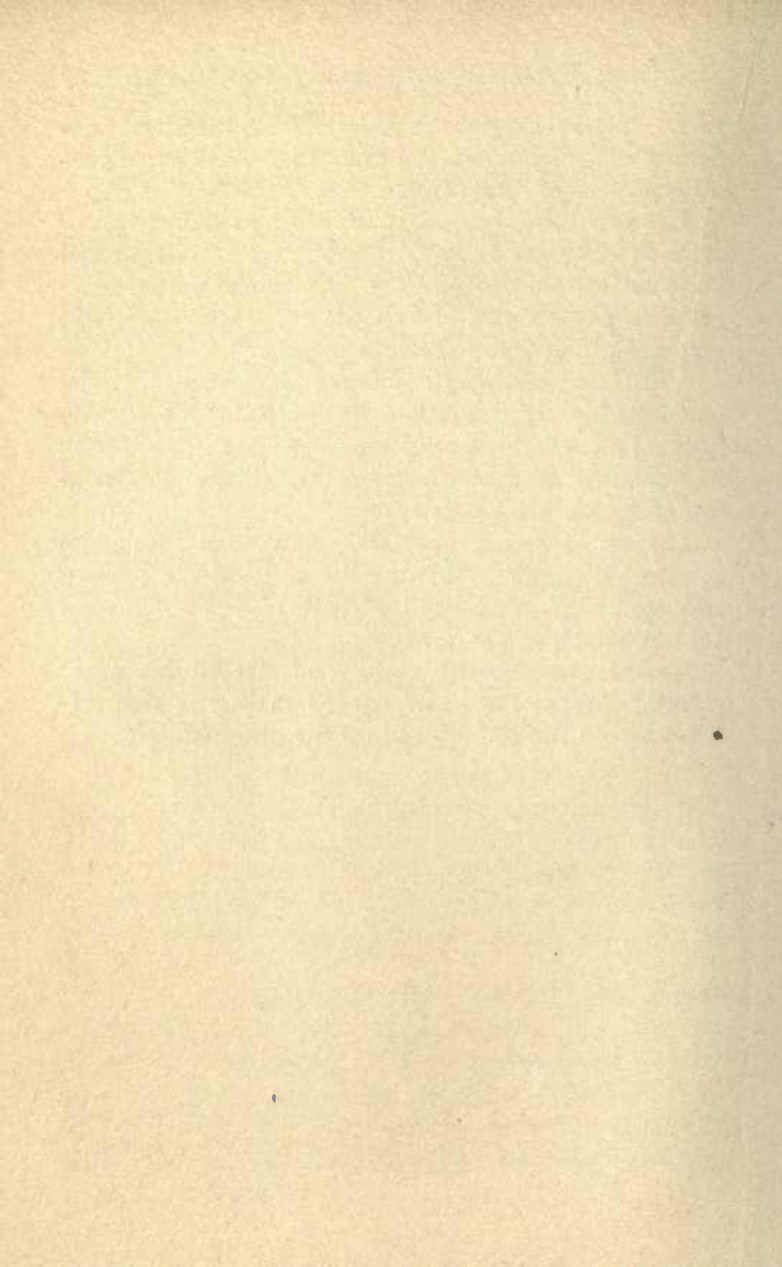
rika. Marika caught the unease like a breath of saddening, clashing music. She saw that Stash made Jenika angry and disappointed with Varsh.

The two big boys—so much alike in some ways—were holding each other's hands, and looked pleased but puzzled what to do next. Suddenly Varsh whispered in Stash's ear: "You get dat Karsh to go wid you down to de lake—w'en you go, see!"

"All right—all right!" shouted Karshenko, as if he had heard every word, and throwing out his elbows, pranced off with high mocking steps. He grinned back in enjoyment of their confusion, his white teeth gleaming under his black mustache.

The day passed off more happily than Stash had dreamed it could. When he had finished the evening row on the lake, he called back gaily: "Remember what I'll say to you at the *Savoy*!"

Marika remembered. She remembered his other words: "What I'm lovin' hardest makes me sickest!" They would run in her head till far into the night.



BOOK FOUR: THE GIFT THAT IS GREATEST OF ALL

CHAPTER I

I

Before the gilded kiosk of the *Savoy*, Rose Maddon slipped from her car, and paused with the Fentree girls and Marika before the display board:

STAN PLAZARSKI.

"I didn't know he had that picture!" Louise murmured.

The ruthless young smile and high arched head presented Stash all right; but he loomed prodigious and foreign from the unnatural retouching of the picture.

"*'The Violin That Talks Patter'*"—Rose's eyes sparkled, her laugh echoed faintly in the rococo foyer. Hers had been such a royal little way of welcoming Marika into the party: simply catching both her hands, to toss them loose in friendly gaiety. For Rose had never met the Varika girls, and it had been embarrassing for Andre to ask a place for Marika.

Beyond the balcony's purple hanging a twilight of dying melody was twinkling out, to the triangles' stricken stars.

"There he is," said Rose, "lolling in the pit with the orchestra." Her tone made Stash's skit seem trifling and miles away.

Yet with the lumbering down of the curtain the orchestra suddenly raced into the specialty number—"But She Doesn't Like to Talk About Herself." The Exits quavered redly and the bull's-eye shed a blue-green sea light from the domed roof.

Abruptly—a violin off-stage dashed into a passionate frivolity. And there with a rush came a challenging mad Stash. His eyes flashed in their darkened circles as he threw his violin to his shoulder and struck off: "*Play that again!*"

"Play it again?" laughed the leader, "sure thing!"

Now Rudolphine thrust out, at her trudging little scuffle. And Stash swung out to meet her, just as he had planned that morning Varika shouted *swoboda* in his ears. She professed a frightful reluctance to say a word about herself; then followed with the most astounding confidences.

He introduced his violin as an actress *and a lady!* And some very saucy things that lady said! The which Miss Mar *guessed* with surprising perspicacity.

Finally she asked him to play that song about herself. So Stash whipped up the confection that Scarbro and he had contrived; while Rudolphine adopted a silvery wry little voice:

"She will talk about bananas,
Wooden shoe strings and pajamas;—
But she doesn't like to
Talk about herself!—"

Somehow the cheapness of it merged in its scuffling dash; and its sharp melody corners were turned at such a rush by the turbulent Stash that he seemed to burst upon the house in full charge, like a squadron of dragoons. He whipped the orchestra into finale with a snap of his bow; while he and Mar squeegeed across

the stage, one foot each in air, still singing—still playing.

A crash of applause seemed to drive them into the wings. His absurdly high spirits had won for Stash.

Marika's heart was twisting with disappointment. He had forgotten his promised message. And that was the way with the whole sweep of this business—it would swerve him away from her. But there!—he was back, looking straight at her! With a final flourish of his bow and a mutter of his carmined lips—he was gone. . . . "*I love you!*"

"I greet you!" murmured Rose Maddon, interpreting his message. But the message—but the greeting—was for Marika.

II

On the stairway that evening Andre showed Stash her lake sketches and told him of Rose Maddon's exciting plan for taking them over to the *Lady Island* in her car. Stash thought it would be great. No, he couldn't go—that was the day of the Sokol¹ Picnic at Cutler's Beach.

"Maybe we could take you," Andre suggested.

"No, I'm going up with the Sokol. I belong to Shabbona lodge."

"I thought from the way you leaned over Rose Maddon after matinée that you'd be crazy to go in her car."

"Oh, I donno!" said Stash, his eyes crinkling provokingly; "the Sokols march to the train with band music! Then in the afternoon a big ball game with a Chicago Sokol that comes over on a big excursion steamer. An' say!—I got a new scheme for if I play! Only this—I got to thinking how a fellow comes

¹ Sokol = Falcon.

ninety-nine per cent to making a grand stand play, an' *never knows* he might have zipped over if he'd just squeezed out a spurt more! So I'm goin' to squeeze out that spurt, see!"

"That doesn't sound especially new to me; and do you know, Stash, you use the bummiest language sometimes!"

He lifted his jagged profile away from her.

"Stash! . . ." She touched his shoulder—"You were so plum enthusiastic about your scheme—after you'd dusted mine off!"

She saw then a laughing play in the side of his face, and he turned his shining eyes: "Well I just been a fool!" And he stretched out his big hard hand for hers.

III

The "4th" gave Rose Maddon's party a dazzling blue sky for the duneland trip. Hugh Marantle, who drove, determined to run along the shore as far as the ship if possible. When they rounded the headland that gave on the stranded boat, Rose raised a little cry of delight.

A new flag sputtered at the truck, and red funnels raked the stainless blue. With each lazy swell that rustled in there showered a spray of water, and the girls' hair still sparkled with iridescent beads as they mounted the companion ladder.

Among the new artist recruits, a lazy viking fellow called "Flamingo" seemed to Andre the most fascinating.

"Let Flamingo show you the boat," Miss Prinzep advised; "he's been a coal-slicer, and knows it topside and below." She turned to Andre: "Why couldn't Stash come?"

"Oh, he's so full of business!" Andre replied. "His latest is getting subscriptions to the *Tribune* to get votes for Rika Varika. She wins a fortune or an automobile—or something. He names her his candidate and writes her name in on the coupons that come out in every paper. Subscriptions count big too. He gathers the coupons on his ad collecting route—says he can do it just as easy as not. I bet he'll be asking all those people at the picnic to-day for their coupons!"

"That's just like him!" Miss Prinzep laughed.

"See here!" Hugh Marantle had swerved to watch a looming white shape far on the smoky blue pavement of the lake.

"Where are the marine glasses, Raoul?" Miss Prinzep called to a stocky alert fellow beside Andre.

"I wonder . . ." Andre exclaimed, as she took the glasses from the friendly Raoul, "I wonder . . . it's the excursion steamer from Chicago bringing over a crowd for the Sokol picnic! . . . At Cutler's Beach!"

With the marine glasses it was easy to see the three decks and the shifting bright figures. They watched its swelling whiteness in such silence that it seemed a ship of apparition.

Then someone laughed: "I hear a band!"

In dreamy gusts came the fantastic gaiety of far-off music. And in that moment Rose's party knew as well as though they had publicly put their heads together that they would push on to Cutler's Beach. The Detroiters' invitation to dinner in the saloon was declined and they set off along the resounding shore.

IV

Behind the breakwater at Cutler's Beach towered the *City of Grand Haven* with glistening empty decks. The

Sokol drills were over, and the bizarre bright crowd were pouring in to the ball grounds.

A stout Bohemian and his stout son in red zouaves dashed by, talking in the clashing Czech tongue. Buckles flashed from their shoes. A tall fellow with a livid scar across one cheek, above a luxurious lace collar, went clowning by with a Slovak lass in Carpathian gipsy dress. "Od Polodna dobra!" he bowed to Louise.

"Let's go on to the ball ground!" she urged. She had felt the fellow's hot breath on her arm.

Through the sultry shimmer the red zouave figures of the Durand team fluttered afield, and began a clashing chatter. The blue trousered lead-off man of the Chicago Sokol stepped out with a falcon feather sputtering on his azure cap. He binged and cleared for second amidst a mad roar from the excursion crowd.

"The Reds are simply outclassed," said Marantle, when four runs had torn across home plate, and the Reds ran in from the field shouting hoarsely.

"Why *don't* they put Stash in!" Louise almost wrung her hands.

And when the Reds took the field again in grim dejection Stash was with them.

"See his funny little feather whiffering!" said Andre. Her throat tightened as she saw him skip lightly backward, pluck down a wild throw and with the same gesture spin it slurring down to first.

The Blue batter stepped aside with a grinning, friendly courtesy to let Stash warm up. It was plain that the Blues weren't worried about this new man.

He settled his cap securely and hurled his whole weight into a few lightning hot shots. . . . Then, lurching forward as though he would throw himself

out of the box, he floated up one that fell as dead as a stone beneath the soughing stick. Strike one!

The sultry gloom of the Durand crowd burst into a roar.

"See poor old Varsh!" Andre laughed. Big Varsh was springing about on his red bloomed legs, shouting wildly.

On the next offering the batter laid down a chunky bunt, which Stash fielded to first with a startled rush. Shouts of "Durand! Plazarski! Durand!" filled the air.

But Stash's heart was pounding painfully. His friends were watching, expecting wonders from him now! He saw Rika's flushed face in the stand. The moment for testing all his foolish windy theories was here! The cruel black stick and smiling, squinting eyes of the giant Blue daunted him. Turning for a last little glimpse of Marika's win-or-die look, Stash drew a deep breath and—snapped his fingers from under the ball. . . . The big Blue chopped smashingly above it!

Still the big fellow towered confidently, wearing his winsome smile that made you want to yield to him. Stash stared above the man's shoulder to focus the magic spot; took the ball into his big fingered confidence and streaked it like a white hot shell. The black bat caught it with a slurring ring. High it spouted like a slender fountain thread . . . then down, down . . . into Kublik's heavy mit. The big Blue threw down his stick with an apologetic grin. The crowd roared. The next man singled, but Stash, with a light-hearted sweep and snap, pegged him off second. Not a run.

Rose saw Stash's falcon feather bobbing above the heads of the Durand team as they swarmed in to the bench. That wild-looking brother of Stash was danc-

ing with Hartranft and the scarred fellow of the lace collar.

v

In a rush of enthusiasm the Reas drove in two runs, making the score 5—3. Stash fanned ignominiously. But the Reds made a great joke of it, patting him on the back as though he had done a mighty thing. He took the box again with an ugly cross-fire in his finger tips and struck out two men.

The next inning added another run to the Reds' score, and Stash in high elation brought Marika round to the Maddon car. She slipped in between Andre and Louise, who had to admire her blue *lajblik*, or bodice, with its red and lavender embroidery. There was a sort of stored-away perfume and foreign smell about it that seemed to remove her from the usual Marika as did the odd dressing of her hair and the excited shining of her eyes.

Another run came in, mounting the score to 5—5. Stash plucked off his jaunty falcon cap and stuck it on Louise's head. He laughed delightedly at the effect, Louise of course put it on Andre, and after that Rose had to try it on.

"Gettin' all kinds of subscriptions and coupons to-day!" Stash's dry lip flicked back eagerly.

"I didn't want him to do it," Marika explained, "but he had already entered my name."

"Goin' to win too!" he exclaimed confidently.

"If it's so easy to talk," said Andre, "let's see you smash out a good hit next time you're up!"

"That's so!" said Rose in pretended surprise, nodding the falcon feather on her head. "He hasn't made a hit yet, has he?"

Stash's mingled chagrin and amusement were laughable.

"Stash," said Marika, frowning anxiously, "don't please go round for more votes after the game!"

"Why sure!—just the time to do it—if we win the game!" He appealed to Hugh Marantle.

"Of course!" said Hugh, grave satire twinkling in his dark eyes.

"I must go, I'm next up," said Stash, and patted Andre's hand that rested on the door's edge.

"Remember, Stash!" she warned, "that just one per cent may be all you need to squirm you over into a grand stand play."

"You!—" he pulled his eyebrows down against his craggy nose—"do you *know* you talk the bummiest talk sometimes!"

In another moment he was at the plate. Two men down, and score 5 to 5. The crowd broke into wild uproar. . . . "Plazzy! Pally Plazarski! Plaz!"

Stash tipped two fouls. The big Blue squinted with inscrutable amusement. One more chance. . . . Crash! His bat had broken—and the ball bounced and trickled off.

"Run!"

His legs felt like feathers under him . . . he lunged at the swimming bag. The shout told him he had made it. . . . He sprang to his feet and was off like a madman. It was so wildly wrong that the first baseman was startled into a half throw. Stash ploughed through the second baseman, upsetting his catch, and swung on to third. The air shook with one roar. He reached the third sack and stopped with a wide lead-off, vibrating towards home. Varsh joined the two Red coaches and threw in his frenzied bass "Stash-a-boy!"

The batter laid down a drive which the Blue pitcher fielded magnificently. But Stash's daring lead mingled a menace with the sudden stormy darkness that had been rolling up; caused the catcher to muff the throw, and flung him in a cascade of dust and arms and feet across the plate. . . . He found himself whirling round and round in Varsh's arms.

VI

The next two innings were played in a dark domed ocean of livid light. The *Grand Haven* surveyed the colored tumult from a glistening white aloofness.

"We'd better be pulling out of this," Marantle looked at the heavy purple blackness in the southwest.

"Just to the end of this inning!" pled Andre.

The next man struck out in freshening puffs of rain. A few moments more and the ozone pungent rain was sheeting across the diamond. The crowd began streaming toward the Casino. The game was called a seven inning game, and the Red Sokol had won.

Marantle swung the car into the shelter of the rustic dining pavilion. Here Stash came running to them, and helped Hugh put up the top and side curtains.

"It's so gloomy and cozy in here—let's stay!" urged Andre. They could see the white-caps freshening on the dark lake. Behind the pavilion the steamer rose ghostly white.

A lull came and Marantle swung the car out. Good-byes were called to Marika, who stood aside with Stash, looking like some sort of gipsy princess in the shadowy spaces of the rustic-roofed pavilion. Stash waved his falcon cap, and took Marika's hand to run across to the Casino, where the bands were already

playing and electric lights twinkled in the lofty gloom.

There was dancing and great noise and chatter around the sides of the huge room. The colored costumes were somehow enhanced by the gloom; and that queer stored-away perfume was loose, made more pungent by the rain.

Stash held tight to Marika's hand, but now and then he was torn away by joyful groups. Once he heard his name called—"Plazarski!"—and found the big pitcher of the Blues at his shoulder.

"You pitched a great game, boy!"

"You had me scared though!" Stash grinned. "This Miss Varika . . . let's see, your name's Krichek?"

"Sure!—All I wanted was a dance with this little girl!" He gave her his nicest smiling squint.

"Well, I ought to known!" Stash laughed; "now go ahead and say what you really think of me!"

"Well——" The big fellow tucked Marika's slender wrist under his big arm, "I wouldn't, little boy, hold my bat across the grain—it might smash that way!"

"Oh, you wouldn't—well, I got a run out of it."

"Yes, and won your own game!" The squint was very mellow now. "Never can tell! Like with me now. . . . See me? . . . When I don't win one thing I win *another!*—"—He smiled down at Marika; and they swept off on the wide floor.

The Shabbatas next adopted Stash, and told everybody in loud voices how he had grown up close to them. He suddenly assaulted them for subscriptions and so rid himself of all but Boly. The only way he could shake Boly was to promise him a dance with Jennika Varika. After leading him round to her he even bettered the scheme by taking the dance for himself, leaving poor old Boly with a gay laugh. This

132 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

trick so raised his spirits that he forgot Bart Shabbata's husky muttering of Marynia's, his mother's, name, which nonetheless had driven a sliver of doubt into his head to lie and fester there.

VII

The Chicago band left. The startling bass *haar* of the *Grand Haven* jarred through the building. They went out to see her stand away on the stormy lake—with a thousand gemming lights.

The crowd that was left drew closer together: "Like all one family," Marika told Stash. Even Hartranft danced—the old country dances, polka, dumka, mazurka. By and by there were fewer dancers on the floor, and fathers cut shamelessly across to gather in elusive children. The electric trains began gonging outside the grounds. The band stopped in the middle of a mazurka and began playing "Homeland Mine." Several older fellows like Varika hummed it in their beards. The first train clanged away to the south, and Stash and Marika on the Casino gallery took their last look at the white-caps winking out on the dark lake.

VIII

As soon as he got into town Stash ran up to the printing office to fill out his coupons. Hartranft was writing the story of the picnic, and "Hungry" Sartos, the printer, was setting it up.

"Look here!" Stash held up a coupon to the light, "see those grease spots!—that's a five hundred vote coupon that ol' Turichek grabbed off their lunch for

me. An' his wife hollered—"There, you leave de chicken all bare!"—Like it was a *baby!*" Stash chuckled. "Say, Hungry, wouldn' it be a great scheme to run off some coupons like these on our kicker press?" He laughed at the sudden whim.

"Yes, an' get-a-good caught at!" said Sartos.

"Say, I didn't mean to do it, you Hungry-head!" snorted Stash; and turned to his signing, slashing Mar-ika's name across the sleazy paper and signing his own—*S. Plazarski*.

He still wore his white tunic; his falcon cap lay on the exchange table beside him. His high head stood out against the deep night blue of the open window.

Sartos stood watching him, and a slow grin spread over his mucilage-colored face with its scanty Avar beard.

CHAPTER II

I

The next week ran off in quick-step fashion. The *Durand Tribune* had played up Stash in its story of the Sokol picnic. With Mar's and Scarbro's help he had worked up a new sketch called "A Fool and His Fiddle." Miss Prinzep had sent word by a Turba *green-stacker* that on the next fine moonlight night a dancing party from Durand would be expected. Stash looked forward with elation to such a night and such a dance on board the *Lady Island*.

On Friday afternoon someone called up the printing office and asked Hartranft if S. Plazarski worked there. "He does," boomed the printer.

"Then tell him from the *Tribune* that we want to

settle with him on the commission basis. He and his candidate are thrown out. And we want you to know that he's been using someone's press to run off coupons like ours," said the brusque voice, "and sent them in for Miss Varika. But they hardly match ours."

Flushed and angry, the printer conveyed his consternation to Sartos.

The glue-colored face with its scrofulous, scanty beard wrinkled uneasily: "You know dat night w'en he say w'at a scheme would it be to print off some?" He was breathing heavily. "An' I say—yes, an' be a good caught at it! I would a told him how dat it wouldn't work widout de types like deirs, but he says he was foolin' an' such."

"*Was it picnic night?*" Hartranft asked. He knew only too well that it was; and was tortured by the feeling that he remembered those very words from Stash. When an hour later Stash came springing up the stairs, Hartranft reported the *Tribune* man's message without a word of softening.

"He lies!" shouted Stash.

"Hold on now—go careful——"

"Hold on nothing!" thundered Stash. "Whoever says I did lies!" And with all his anger, it seemed as if a terrible knot was tightening on his throat. "How'd you think I could do it with you around—and Sartos?"

"At night—on the *elbow kicker*. The doing's simple!"

"*I didn't!*" Stash knotted all the force of him behind his bulging brows.

"Prove it to them then," said Hartranft; "you'd better go right over now."

II

When they couldn't be persuaded at the *Tribune* office that the writing on the faked coupons was different from Stash's, he asked for some of the faked stuff to show Hartranft.

The contest manager, Bill Marion, told him to take it along: "I hope you can satisfy him, young fellow. But your writing hasn't any fixed character; and this faked stuff is scrawled as if you'd been in a wild hurry . . . well, you see!"

Then Stash's dark eyes pled along with his hand thrown out: "Don't let this go in!"

"No can stop. It's locked. You see—with your Savoy stuff—and the Sokol team—you see how it is. It's news. Sorry! I have a *feeling* you're all right, Plazarski—and if I can ever do anything personally—come see me!"

Stash hurried back to Hartranft's; and slashing off his name in a wild hurry, placed it first beside the genuine coupons, and then beside the fakes. His upper lip flicked back in savage white eagerness: "Now see—in *my* writings there isn't that funny little quirk in the *M* . . . in the *Marika*"—his voice trembled out in an angry whisper.

"He might have plan to change that little bit," Sartos spoke over his shoulder, "so to let him out if he got caught."

"Well, that's right!" said Hartranft, "and Sartos says you spoke to him once of printing coupons?"

Stash made a spring and gripped Sartos' humped shoulder. "That's how you got the idea!" he shouted. "*He* printed 'em!"

"Now see here!" said Hartranft, "you make matters worse by showing like a cavalry officer!"

Stash turned ablaze on him: "I got a notion all the time that he was the one! His speakin' up showed he was 'fraid it wasn' goin' to stick on me! I didn' tackle him till then, did I?—Answer me that!"

"No——" Hartranft stared at him coolly, "you've just been a little too fresh and frisky ever since you came here."

"Yes, and that's what Sart had against me, I s'pose!" He stared down at the floor, a sudden shame and misery overcoming him, presenting him poignant images of his people, the Fentrees, Varikas, Marika—all overwhelmed by his disgraceful situation. It seemed as if he could not control the flood of terrible unhappiness that twisted his throat and burned his eyes. . . . *Marika!* . . . Stooping, he scratched blindly on the floor for the scattered coupons . . . hiding his face.

Suddenly he felt his head full to bursting, and in a fearful revulsion from that shame he raised himself. . . . His arm started out towards Sartos. His bulging brows closed his eyes to black points. Hartranft made a move to stop him. . . .

"I see you, Sartos! You don't pull away behind him like that! You thought I was gettin' ahead of you, huh! You're going to clear me out o' town! . . . That's why you been trying to scare me about *old Jastrow*—tellin' that he promised to clean out the Plazarskis so long as there's any left around! Well, I'm here! . . . An' he can remember what Uncle Jan did when Leo Jastrow tried to squeeze him! I don' blame him if he remembers that! . . ."

"Hold on! Hold on!" Hartranft stepped between them.

"Hold on nothing!" thundered Stash, lifting his packed fist. "I got a bunch of fives for all of you—see!" His voice roared and rocketed in the small room. He had got himself into a drunken rush of outrage, where he cared only to sweep on into worse outrage, outdoing that which had been done to him. "And I'm just that much afraid of old man Jastrow—or any the fellows hangs round his hole—that I tell you to come on!—just *come on!*" He fell back towards the door, and shouting again—"Come on!"—he swung through the dark hallway and drummed downstairs.

CHAPTER III

I

Stash took his newspaper to a bench in the Court House square. It was getting dusk; a cab clattered by; moths circled the icy lavender of an arc lamp. He turned to the sporting page, where a week ago there had been a racy pen and ink sketch of himself among the picturesque or funny figures of the Sokol picnic. He read the words of the baseball news, as if by bleak force of habit to return to those days of bright triumph. . . . A far off world from this land's end! . . . Suddenly that look of Bartek Shabbata's and his hoarse whispering of Stash's mother's name came into his head. . . . His mother? . . . What did it mean? . . . Well . . . oh, God! how he hated everybody! He sprang up and started across the square.

After a tasteless lunch at the *Whitehaven*, he wandered slowly down to the *Savoy*. He was the first man through the zinc door, and sat in the pit's vaulted dusk,

138 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

turning his music in an effort to forget the wild fancies that tore through his head—drowning the rumbling of the empty theatre and the random gusts of whistling or clattering calls “in back.”

The house filled up, and his call for the sketch took him behind. He went through his lines and music in a kind of daze of desperation, feeling that every eye was pitying or scorning him, and at the curtain found Slason muttering staccato in his ear:

“You jingled your cues, Plaz; if you don’t get a better hand to-morrow’s mat, we’ll have to pull it off the bill. . . . Get in though and vamp up another, kid.”

But Stash felt this was his congé, and avoiding little Mar’s reproachful, partly penitent look, he swung out into the alley.

II

He had forgotten his bold defiance in Hartranft’s office; all that he was capable of feeling now was a raging desire to be quit of it all, to get out of this town where everyone despised him.

Turning up a diagonal path beneath the dark trees of the Court House grounds, he hurried to the basement telephone booth. It was under the heavy granite stairs, where a flat stony smell of chlorides from the jail cells pooled its strength with other bleak odors.

“Koban Lake 241.”

How many times he had called that number with happy eagerness . . . and with hasty, poor excuses!

“Marika? . . . This is Stash,” he muttered huskily. “Say, Rika, I guess there isn’t any place in this town for me—I guess I got to go!—”

“Oh, Stash! . . .” His heart beat faster to hear her

voice so eager. . . . "You mean because—because that in the paper?"

"Yes, *but I didn' do it, Rika! . . .*"

"Don't tell me!—because I know, I know you didn't!"

"It was Sartos put it on me. And I don' care, I wouldn' care at all—if it didn' take you in!—before them all! I'd just stay an' show 'em how much I cared. But Slason said if I didn' get a better hand to-morrow matinee he'd pull me off—an' that means for good. But I'd *make* 'em give me a strong one! *I'd put it through!*" His voice rose in the old soaring confidence, catching a contagion of hope from her trembling laugh. "I'd put it through, Rika, if I knew you didn' mind! All the—the shame!"

"I don't care, Stash, if *you* don't care! All I care about is just to help. Of course you can do it! I'll just see Andre and we'll get up a party to go to the *Savoy* to-morrow. . . . We'll just give you such terrible applause!" . . . Her tremulous laugh—now so dim and dear—seemed floating on in his mind after he had hung up the receiver.

III

Out on the street again, he drew a deep breath to clear his lungs of the ugly perfumes of hellebore and chloride, and sprang along towards the crest like resolution on the march. He felt as he swung down Wacaser Street to Fentrees' that no one could stop him or down him.

In the full flush of this new impulse, he called Andre out on the veranda and told her his plans. . . . "And Rika's going to see you—" he muttered hoarsely—

"and you're going to get up a balcony party—give me a strong hand, you see, at to-morrow's mat! . . ."

"Are we? . . ." Andre acted a bit astonished, and paused. . . . Stash heard the rustling of the maples in the freshening night breeze. . . . He caught a slant of light from the window on Andre's face . . . and saw something strange there. . . .

"But I expect that we're going over to the *Lady Island* to-morrow evening, you know . . ."

"You 'spect? . . ."

"Why, yes, Rose called up this afternoon and said——"

"Did she say anything about me going?" Stash demanded with a harsh ring in his voice.

"No-o——"

"No!—— Maybe she's seen the papers! . . . *like you!*" He made a stride toward the edge of the porch.

"Wait—Stash!" Andre darted after him. . . . "Rose thought maybe you wouldn't want to go now, perhaps. . . . And you know from the start I didn't think it was right—your putting up Marika's name without her knowing it. . . ."

"Well, I didn' care about that!" Stash threw out his hand, "but I thought you'd be by me!—next to Rika!" His face shone knotted in the door light.

"I would—oh, I would, Stash—— But all gathering in the balcony to applaud you—— It's too——"

"Yes, I know—I know how it seems to you! I been too fresh all the time. . . . Expectin' people to like it when I got ahead! . . . That's the fool thing of all!" He dropped his head, laughing a little gruffly. . . . "I see that now . . . But I thought anyway—somehow you'd . . . Oh, I dunno!—but I thought you'd be standing by me—next to Rika! . . ."

He paused a moment, with one foot lingering on the top step; and in that moment Andre made a move to fling out her hands to him—and draw him back—and tell him how sorry she felt for him, and how angry with his everlasting “freshness” and absurd repentant interest in himself, and how—after all—how she loved him for the sake of his old boyish self and the old times! . . .

But in that moment something strange and wild had come over his face, and he had sprung down the steps and started off up the street at a run.

CHAPTER IV

I

Stash came in late that night; it was long before he slept; and he awakened the next morning from out of a horrible dream. . . . In the dreary old hotel room his mother had been crying to him. . . . He sat on the top of the black piano where Uncle Jan had put him. . . . His father Bolish was staring angrily at them—but mostly at his mother. . . . It hurt him with the vague but awful agony of dreams to think how she had cried—how she had held out her arms to him—how he had pulled away in fright. . . .

It was so terribly real, and seemed connected with his feeling of queer repulsion for the dark bulk of a piano. . . . Could it be that this had all happened back there in Koban Lake Hotel? And that his mother? . . . Stifling conjectures pumped through his brain in this dusky hour of morning.

He had seen certain base and significant things

around the old Tunnel theatre; but he had always been too busy with plunging boyish schemes to follow these underground trails. But now in his brief tortured sleep certain channels of his brain had burst down and poured out clouds of horrible suspicions. . . . Who was he? . . . Did Fentrees know anything about his mother? . . . What—what if he *had* printed those coupons—in his sleep—or in some hiatus of his better self! . . . He felt his head whirling.

All morning long he walked about the back streets of town, avoiding everyone he knew, thinking and fighting down the suspicions that tortured him. And in the afternoon his doubts flooded back as he searched the *Savoy* tiers for a sight of Marika! . . . None of his friends were there. As it came time for his sketch he felt his heart pounding inside the rough coat of the foolish fiddler. And the lumpy clothes and the peaked shoddy hat he felt were his own—in a wild dazed feeling, as though drifting out of his old life forever. . . .

“‘I stop to say good-bye!’” he cried, “‘but I can’t! . . . On account-a dat falcon in my heart—he’s maka such a crying! Not dat I care’”—storming off his desolation—“‘but dat-a falcon—in thees my heart—Meesa Lady—he’s a-dying! . . .’”

Throwing up his arms as if terrified at something happening inside him, he flung off stage playing wildly on his violin. The stage direction of the playlet had called for a soft diminuendo, but Stash had given the thing a mad turn, a passionate abrupt ending.

“Jingled again!” Slason made to stop him angrily.

But Stash brushed past, casing his violin, and stumbled blindly into the alley.

II

He found himself wandering out on the Koban Lake road. At times he sat on the bank of the river with head on his knees, thinking, thinking—until he could stand it no longer, and sprang up a little wildly, afraid of himself.

The sun was slanting low when he reached the hostinets. There had been no support he had counted on so surely as Marika's. She had been staunch for him ever since the earliest days . . . even when he hadn't been especially true to her. He saw this so plainly now in his sadness. He saw that nothing could ever take the place of loyalty. His terrible want of it now told him that it was the greatest gift of all. He couldn't live without it. Shame, chagrin and fear could not keep his lagging feet from dragging him towards Varikas' in despairing search of it.

Suddenly he saw Varika fidgeting on the front platform; and behind him Marika, looking eagerly but fearfully forward, yet not moving beyond the door. She began to speak like a sleepwalker, pantingly: "I—Stash!——"

"You keep still!" Varika shot back at her; "and as for him—well, dis!—dat he's brought such a shame on you dat it's enough to last for *one* day!"

"Who?" croaked Stash, the blood filling his head.

"You!" shouted Varika, dashing down at him: "*Idea* my lettin' her go in dere to-day to dat damn place—hear you feedle aroun'! An' everybody lookin' at her, sayin' what-a-fool dat girl is makin' of herself after him! Jus' as if it wasn' enough, to put her name up in de paper an' den play such a trick dat you got

ever'body laughin' at her! Ansfer me dat! Ah God! I don't understand what a smart young devil you got since you been livin' in cities. Clear away from here widout any more shame for my girl an' my family!——"

Stash quivered between choking rage and a burst of scorching tears.

The tears were now streaming down Marika's cheeks, while she did nothing but hold out her hands crossed—as in the happy days—toward Stash!

He flung out an arm to Varika: "You wouldn't let me tell you how it was if I tried! I *didn't* do it! Can't you see I wouldn't!—'cause everything is killed now!"

The terrible ring of those last words started Marika forward with a rush. But Stash had changed suddenly, shouting at Varika: "You think I care what you think!—just like that!"—hurling his fist as if crashing something to the ground. "You with your damned old *swobodie* talk an' foolishness!" And he swung away and down the road.

He had got as far as the Buttonwood bridge when he heard someone padding in the dust behind him. He pounded swiftly on, yet wondering who—who. . . . He turned and saw—not Marika—but *tasich* Varika. There were tears in his eyes. He flung his arm over Stash's shoulder:

"Good God, boy! Couldn't you see I didn't mean it?—it was jus' my damn fool mouth!"

Stash flung him off, but paused; and something about the helpless little man with his reddened eyes screwed Stash's heart with an anguishing pity for them all. In another moment Varika had Stash's arm hugged against his side, and started back, talking vociferously in a voice still croaky from crying:

"Why, I'd have to kill myself, boy, if I thought I'd drove you away like dat;—yes, but you see a man gets crazy sometimes, so he's gotto do something just opposite to what he wants, for de poison dat's in him!"

III

Later when they were happy on the lavitza together, Varika, humming and letting his pipe go out in his jolly perturbation, finally tapped Stash's shoulder: "But when you say dat word *swoboda* at me, I remember all in a flash how when I talk *swoboda* I am generous an' good"—he waved his pipe—"an' noble to all de world! You see?"

Stash chuckled heartily in token of understanding: "Of course I was a fool, blurtin' that out. Say, but it was all like when you used to come after us with your long pipe for stealin' fruit—unwindin' that green string that held the bowl on that long stem, an' beggin' us to stop so's you could beat us up with it."

Varika shouted with laughter. "Same way!—an' I couldn't have beat you *den*!"

And the moon came up, marbling the ground under the alders. And Marika said: "I s'pose it's shining on the boat up there—where they're dancing—Kra-kanosh——" There was a note of appeal in that old play name—*Krakanosh*.

"I s'pose," said Stash; "and which place would I rather be, Rika? You know! . . . An' I don' care that I'm out of my jobs. I'm *proud* I don' care!"

"Varsh is working in the Carnarvon Iron Company——"

"That's the Marantle works," said Stash.

"Why don't you go in there, and get Varsh on their

team—they've got such a fine one? Show everybody—you and Varsh together! Don't you feel about Varsh—don't you want to help him. He's so good-natured. Don't you, Krakanosh?" She appealed again to the play-name of old play times in Lantern Woods. "Don't you feel so full sometimes, like you must do something for Varsh?—Like *tasich*-daddie said a while ago. It would be so nice to be like *tasich* is!—noble and generous an' good he said he was——"

"Na-na-na! I said I *feel* generous an' all dat!——"

"No, sir!" laughed Rika. "You left out the *feel*—didn't he, Stash? You said—'When I talk *swoboda* I am generous an' noble——' "

"Young *jertovnik*!"¹ snorted Varika, while Stash shouted.

"Well—well—well!" chuckled Varika; and addressed approaching figures: "Go on away, Shabbata; go in where Alois is—we're alone." The shadowy figures from the moonlit road passed in.

"And when you feel that way," continued Marika, "best you would do it right off! For *Varsh*, Stash!——"

"I believe I will!" Stash pounded the curved arm of the lavitza. Then something strangely turned his thought from that splendid enterprise of loyalty. "Do you know," he suddenly asked, "anything—do you remember anything 'bout my mother?"

"No, I don't remember I ever saw her . . . just hearing about her. . . ."

"Oh-h-h——" said Stash softly, with a sort of suppressed and buried anguish. . . . Out beyond the alders shadowy figures passed in the moonlit road.

¹ *Jertovnik* = Joker.

CHAPTER V

I

Stash brought his trunk out to Koban Lake Hotel, to live with Varsh, and went into the Carnarvon Iron works.

It gave him a catch of pain whenever he thought of leaving Fentree without a word. And it happened one morning, when he had gone in to town to meet Lee Luders, that he ran into the lawyer near the station. His hurried words—“*Come back when you can, Stash!*” and his harassed, worried look haunted Stash on his way back to Varikas’.

“Old Lee”—whose visit Stash had planned exultantly—made himself at home in no time at the hostinets. The charm of a warm cloudy morning with three girls to question him about life and Detroit and himself stimulated the bland particularity of the fellow.

Varika dashed out to apostrophize him now and again: “Didn’t hear about our Sokol picnic—great ol’ picnic on de lake?”

“Yes,” smiled young Luders, cupping his hands to light a cigarette, “I simply heard about that extensively, from a newspaper Stash sends me and these ladies, so that probably I have pretty near mastered it.”

Varika understood this for a rebuff; but it was so delightfully given, so frank, so bland, so lazily impudent, that the little man slapped his shoulder and laughed: “You got all you need here, eh?—Don’t want me in your audience—all right—all right!”

II

Stash had left for his work at the Carnarvon. Jenika soon tired of Lee and drifted away. But Marika felt that she must entertain Stash's old friend so that his visit would be a big success. Hadn't they talked of it so many times—and hoped such vague tremendous things of it? She took him down the Koban road to the overcast lake, and there in a scaly, sandy old boat sat listening to him eagerly—anxiously.

"You see," said Lee, rolling his prominent blue eyes indolently, "I want to go into the producin' business, that is, y'know, musical shows, for in that is the best money; so that if Stash wants to come back and work up the show line gradual while I work up the musical line, there is no doubt about succeeding later on, with capital. Of course just now too young, but you see what he did with that 'She Doesn't Like to Talk About Herself' which he sent me a professional copy, but now that's a good song."

"But Mr. Scarbro did most of that—Stash just gave him the idea."

"*Idears* is just what I like him best to have, and then the rest y'know gradual; and if he would let me steer him we could be producers in five years——"

"But you see," said Marika, gripping the flutter in her hands *tight*, "I want you would help him work here, until he has shown them he can't be put down by lies." Her voice shook, and she brought down her fist on the edge of the boat.

"Oh, well," said Lee, pausing in lighting a cigarette to spread out one hand, "he isn't essential to my

schemes, y'see; it's just I like him an' we get along,—an' I like him, that's all."

"Well, I want him to win right here, so that people will have to say—'That's Stash Plazarski that they tried to put down, but such a boy as he was got right in and worked——' You see! Like the way men talk. Don't you think it would give him the best feeling to begin that way?" Her moist dark eyes, flashing to bits of gold, sought eagerly a solution in his glazed blue ones.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "I will present him both schemes. . . . A pretty lake here." He dusted cigarette ashes in it. "Y'see I can't tell what he wants to make of himself. *Bla!* That's the whole damn trouble with that boy, that he don't himself know what he's aimin' for *solid!* No idear! Some noble fine thing all glitter—something like that he wants! But practical things—now you're talking! I'm not telling what I live for; I live for good things, music, flowers, pretty sights, good food: and I will know how to go about it; but *Stash might so desire to do some crazy thing, like climbin' up on a high peak, just to get there an' get hoarse yellin'!* Y'see he's a little bit crazy, but let him have what he wants; that's the way I am with people." He smiled in genial recommendation of himself.

He even lent himself that evening to analyzing Stash's *cross-fire*, when a small crowd gathered by the blacksmith shop on the clam-scented shore road to watch the Plazarski brothers warming up. The reckless-faced younger brother stood with rough shirt rolled back on burn-scarred arms. Behind him crouched Lee Luders, snicking up his ultra-smart gray trousers and whiffing his cigarette as he suggested im-

provements based on his minute analysis of the American League stars.

III

The next morning—Sunday—Stash and Lee went down to Koban Lake and rowed out lazily; talking of times that conjured a presentiment of such a city as lives on northern waters only—or in one's dreams. Luders sketched his plans. Stash warmed to them.

How had the short space of two months carried him such worlds away from that city on the straits, with its varied haunts so dear? He could see it all again: *Lafayette, St. Aubin, Joseph Campau and John R.*—streets so different from *Shabbona* and *Wacaser*. He gazed into blank distance, letting those vistas change and swim desirably, hauntingly, before him. . . . He saw Autumn coming down all the long avenues. . . .

And then he thought of Marika, and his promise that he would stay and fight it out. Nothing binding of course. . . . He saw Porson's Landing on the river, and St. Clair with its azure Venice realm. . . .

"How did you get the idear about that song," Luders asked, "'She Doesn't Like to Talk About Herself'?"

"Well!—they never *did*—around the old Tunnel theatre—no! just till they got all out of breath, that's all!" He chuckled. "Oh, Lee! we had fun there! Heh?" An exuberance of memory warmed him all through. He smelled the *rose-geranium* stale fragrance of the old theatre with its peculiar odor of make-up stuff. . . . "And the violin shop, heh?" His eyes squinted shut with the recollection of the resinous old room; he saw the blue-tinged daffodil lights cropping out in Library Street; and the murmur of Spring

evenings was in the air. . . . The shadow of his mother suddenly crossed the picture.

"Did—did my mother say anything 'bout my coming back?"

For the first time Lee seemed disconcerted; he tapped the ashes from his cigarette: "Why, not much——" In truth he too had warmed to the prospect of having Stash with him again. With Stash's strength bent to his plans he saw them taking speedier fruition.

Stash was sunk in thought: something had fogged the picture.

Then young Luders did a thing fairly courageous: "Y'know," he said, "she—the little girl here, y'know—she wants you to stay—pretty bad she wants it."

"Does she? . . ." stammered Stash. He saw the smoky dark eyes taking fire of gold—as they had looked into his eyes, oh, so many times. . . . He had promised her. . . .

"I guess—I guess, Lee, I better stay here for that chance of working up on the Carna'von team—and then Durand Tri-State. You know—it's a chance."

"It's a chance——" said Luders. "Go to it." He was blandly noncommittal. But a little later, feeling that Stash must be disappointed, he said: "Besides—I wouldn't keep it from you that your mother doesn't want you back; although I did keep it back at first, because you have a right to decide for yourself . . . but I know that for a fact."

Stash hung his head and looked down into the bubbling green depths.

"She thinks—I wouldn't say what she thinks—as I have no idear—but she says it is better for you to stay here."

He left that afternoon; and it was in the evening

when Stash sat strangely silent on the lavitza that Marika said: "Stash—Stash, I wanted to tell you—don't think just because you told me you'd stay that——"

"You're wantin' me to go, are you?" he demanded with a sort of morose chuckle.

"No—oh, Stash, no! But I got to thinking about your mother—since that night you spoke about her—oh, ever since. Maybe she's just in such a longing to have you back. But I couldn't speak!—Until Lee came and told what chances for you back there."

"Those chances are all in his head," said Stash gruffly; "my mother doesn't want me back—Lee said so."

"Oh-h-h——" said Marika softly, just as Stash had said it that night when he had questioned her about his mother.

CHAPTER VI

I

In her secret heart Marika thought Lee Luders not good enough for Stash; but she was elated when Tom Shieling joined their nights under the alder trees, around the lavitza.

Tom found a strange fascination in all this: Varsh and Karshenko making a *hudba* with their accordions; the girls dancing; the little strolls up the starlit road; the jokes and the gaiety, of such a haunting flavor as hung round the old lobby with its poppy seed spiciness. At times he caught a flashing smile from Jenika, and his heart flared up like a throbbing red cinder.

Before Tom as witness—Stash grew proud of being in the heart of this hot dusky life. When the night's fun was over, as he swung down the road with Karsh and devilish Karshenko arm in arm, singing comically or with sudden spurts of passion, he felt that he belonged here. He said good-bye exultantly to all his chance of splendid enterprise and retired as with a shout of passionate repudiation to this pulsating land whose dark night shore gave him revel.

II

Leaning over the Buttonwood bridge one noon, Marika spoke to Tom Shieling about getting Stash on the Carnarvon team.

"Yes, I knew young Doran at State pretty well," said Tom. "I'll put in a word. . . . Ask him why he doesn't work the Plazarskis one game. . . . And, Rika—do you s'pose you could put in a word for me with Jennika?"

She flushed: "I like you, Tom!" she began impulsively.

"And I like you," he answered a little fiercely; "I'd love you," he added grimly, "if it wasn't for Stash."

"Why Stash?" Marika murmured huskily.

"Because he wants you—he may not know it—but he does!"

"In you there's just such a true friend!" she cried with a little ring in her voice.

"Sometimes. Others—I'd sell a friend." His jaws knotted. "I can't keep to my work. I look up—and her face is there—proud and cruel—and yet crying inside! When I try to shut her out, I freeze over to the whole world. I can't go on!"

"I guess you don't love her for the comfort she gives you, but for the discomfort," Marika spoke half sadly, half smilingly.

"Maybe!" said Tom, biting his lip over this thought, that the cruel distraction of her moods had its fascination for him.

"I think," said Marika, flushing with the courageous exertion it took, "I could tell you how it is. She loves Varsh, but she is ashamed of him. So she is angry with herself. She admires you—oh, like we all do! And she is afraid she would go to you—because she sees she would then have all she dreamed of—places to go, and all—And leave behind Varsh and all that bothers her—with this country place and Papa's saloon—so common!"

Tom's teeth sunk deeper in his lip; then suddenly he took her hand and said: "Thank you, Rika—I won't come back then. . . . There—there! I know what's good for me. And I'll be better for staying away—except missing you. . . . Good-bye!"

After he was gone she leaned on the bridge. One tear fell on the black ironwork, but she nudged the others back with her fist. Something about Tom's spirit made her hate useless whimpering. She wondered if she should have told so much for Jennika's rebellious heart . . . out of her own!

CHAPTER VII

I

On a Saturday night in early August, Stash stood in the local room of the *Tribune*, looking down on

Wacaser Street, and trembling a little with expectation. He had dashed up from the street on a mere hazard.

A curt hand fell on his shoulder; he looked round into Bill Marion's questioning but not unfriendly face.

"Well, Plazarski——"

"No, I don't want anything!" Stash grinned: "Just to put in a kick that you don't give more space to our team at the Carnarvon."

"You playing on it?" said Marion, sitting on the big table and folding his arms.

"Two batteries," said Stash, "my brother and I are one."

"Well put—good! Glad you're on. I hoped you'd stay round and do something—'stead of cutting and running. Why don't you write up the games—snappy—and send 'em in?"

"Ho!" Stash laughed, "I couldn'! You see, I use pretty bum language!"—quoting Andrea Fentree, whose face and fashion twinkled in the back of his head as he spoke—"and sometimes it gets into my writing."

"What do we keep copy readers for? Snappy's the stuff. I s'pose you never wrote anything on Hartranft's paper?"

"Once in a while—but he had to put it into Czech. I guess I better be going."

"Well, that's always a safe play around here. But come in and see me occasionally, Plazarski." He gave the big Pole boy a hard hand grip.

II

Stash loitered on towards Wacaser ridge, whistling softly. The second step in his rehabilitation had

been taken, and he felt the thrill of righting himself before the big smoky town.

Pausing at the top of the ridge, he heard a laugh that sounded like Andre's, and Rose Maddon's car swept under the street lamp, with Hugh Marantle driving, and Louise, Andre and Max Dundin in the tonneau. He wondered if they saw him under the trees. He couldn't now conceive the hardihood to jump the running-board of that machine, as he had once thought little of doing.—Unless, of course, someone dared him!—Or—he dared himself—as back there under the *Tribune* sign-globe. . . . He made a tentative spring that way to follow headlong—and stopped short in chagrin, realizing it the kind of thing the Polak hoodlums of town were noted for.

They had him set down for such a one now. He supposed even Andre and Louise thought of him that way; and Rose Maddon would probably refuse to look at him. Yet he was to learn his mistake a few days later.

Coming back from the Carnarvon plant that noon by Koban shore road, he met Rose alone in her car. She waved and smiled—pulled up beside him.

"I didn't know you'd see me," said Stash, stuffing dirty, blistered hands in his black overalls.

"Uuuh!" said Rose, making a gesture of disgust, "as if I cared what they say or think! That would be just enough to challenge me."

"Well, that's the way *I* am," said Stash, "if it's a dare—why I—— But what do they say about me?"

"Really want to know?" Rose's eyes were sparkling with irrepressible mischief.

"Sure," said Stash, "I'll swallow anything you make up!"

"Well, guess I won't. You like to talk about yourself too much. 'But He Doesn't Like to Talk About Himself! . . .'" She trilled this in a golden grained voice, one of dallying, staggering sweetness, it seemed to Stash. Her blue eyes squinted so tight that only frittering little sparks of azure seemed escaping.

Stash laughed till his big jutting nose puckered; and folded his arms in disdain of their obvious dirt and scars. He applauded like a careless ragged courtier who had left Court on a whim but still loved his Queen. "I dare you now to tell!"

"You *knew* I couldn't swallow a dare! But I'll dare you back sometime! Remember!"

"Get it off your chest!" Stash grinned impudently, like a courtier turned rogue on the road.

"They say you've fallen to your right level." She shrugged as if to tone it down by a flick of contempt for them.

Stash's jaw hardened, but he grinned down at his black overalls and said: "I s'pose they mean *this*—and all!"

"*And all*—principally," said Rose; "you mustn't stay out here, you must get back—you must show them!"

"I'm going to," said Stash grimly.

"I've just been out to see Marika," said Rose.

"Good!" Stash smiled his one really enchanting smile, the one that showed his pleasure in anything done for Marika.

III

Somehow what Rose had said reinforced his determination to get back. Marion's O. K. of his *copy* on the next Carnarvon game gave him a chance to

tell the big friendly fellow his ambition. It was nothing less than making the Durand team.

Marion was not surprised. "I thought you'd be up to that next. With Romain traded out the staff's gone soggy. That's in your favor. Get a game with them for the Carnarvons some open date. That'd give you a chance to bingle in. Expect to land your brother too?"

"I hadn't thought of that." Stash bit the corner of his lip. The fact that it might leave Varsh in the lurch didn't block his resolution much. The azure of his enterprise a little blinded him.

According to plan, he and big Bill walked down to the *Richelieu* one evening to see Skanlock. The great man met Stash with tolerant good humor. Stash gave him his second best smile, the one he used when something nice was on the boards for Stash; and gripped the great one's hand in his own huge crunching grip. Something about this grip made Skanlock run his eye up and down the springy boyish figure.

Bill Marion never talked to anyone save with a take-it-or-leave-it bluntness—even to "Sailor" Skanlock, manager-captain, who now stretched his long waist and remarked:

"We might put it through—as you say—'n open date. See what he can do against a real aggregation."

Stash's lip flicked back eagerly: "When a fellow holds the Monhawks to five hits——"

Skanlock interrupted him. "He's got a long upper-works——" he scanned Stash as through a sextant, as though he saw him miles away—"lean upper-works—He's no bluff-bow." He nodded aside to Marion; and then as a concession to Stash added, "I

was glad to see you trim Merkle's bunch—I've had my eye on you."

To say that Stash was startled at this reputed espionage would be too mild; he was humbled, elated, proud, chagrined that he had started to describe the game; in short, affected exactly as Skanlock intended. He gave the great "Sailor" a more terrific hand-grip than he knew was in him, which Skanlock met with a knuckle-cracker of his own. It seemed to Stash that a real thrill of partnership joined them in that moment.

IV

The ragged courtier returned to court. And sometimes Rose Maddon waved him a fleeting smile; but never stopped him on the streets of Durand . . . as she had on the lake shore road.

With Louise Fentree it was different. The first time she passed him in Marantle's car she compelled that distinguished dark young fellow to stop. Her flushed cheeks showed that she was doing it by force of will, against some impediment of doubt about Stash. Yet in a few moments they were talking quite at ease.

"Did you know Andre is talking about going to Art School in Detroit? Miss Prinzep is planning it. They had a show for Andre before they left the boat. Mr. Diblee's are wonderful. He signs his water-colors with a pink flamingo in the corner. Always of water scenes. He's going to Australia on a freighter.—That shows he's no lady's man. All right!—smile Mr. Hugh—but you know you'd like to drop everything and go away to the end of the world!"

"That's the way I'm going to do," Stash squinted his eyes in malicious good humor. "But first I'm going

to show them in this town that I can climb up again after they've squashed me down."

"There are quite a bunch of people in this town," Marantle almost drawled, "and a good many of them would be shocked to know they squashed you. They never felt it."

"If you'll just bring it to their attention," Stash's eyes narrowed dangerously, "they'll be glad to know, —because they like to kick a fellow that's down. *They say he's fallen to his right level.*"

Suddenly he looked much older to Louise, who exclaimed uneasily: "Town seems to be getting dirtier and busier all the time. And getting noted too—with Jim Brerton's car winning at Indianapolis. And the coal mines—Stash, did you know I'm a coal baroness of Bowling Green."

"No!—fine!"

"It's a fake proposition," said Marantle, urbanely critical, "anything Imbrie's in."

"He does that!——" Louise frowned anxiously, "all the time!"

"Come to the big game Sunday," said Stash, as he turned to leave, "the Marantle men are going to beat Durand."

"We'll be there," Hugh called back.

The papers were already carrying the notice: DURAND VS. CARNARVONS. Batteries: Pegler and Rohl—Plazarski and Killian. There was Stash's one grief: that Varsh's burned hand would prevent his catching the game. It grieved him, because he had caught a glimpse of the nobility of loyalty. Yet in spite of this he felt the thrill of coming victory: he knew that he would win!

At times he wondered rather angrily how much of

the grandiose promise of cities and shining boulevards he must give up for the service of a dim idea of loyalty to his own people. How much? . . . how *much*!

His boyhood dreams were still fixed deep in his brain. He caught clearer visions at times of the splendid emprise he desired. He saw proud theatres, and shining waterways, and avenues trailing a phosphorescence of night brilliance like the wake of a lofty ship. His whole body thrilled to it. He must be on!—he must be going!—to meet those dark faces and encounters! The dark faces might flash to his angrily instead of friendly; the misty streets might clear harsh and dreary. Shadowy eyes might seek his with undreamed sweetness, and sad eyes with terrifying distress. . . . The dream would change. . . . But the enterprise would draw him on to find it—to find it at last.

BOOK FIVE: "BACK TO THE BOULEVARDS"

CHAPTER I

I

If Stash could have pictured his arrival in Detroit with Scarbro and old Maunsell he might have hesitated before the great venture. Yet he appeared unconscious of being the head of the oddest trio that ever entered the Straits City on a harsh November day.

On his right Scarbro, in a brown skimpy overcoat, carried his precious libretto and score under one arm, and smoked a cigarette in a fussy amber holder. On the left swung old Maunsell, sweeping the world with a conquering glance, while his frowsty iron-gray hair draggled the false astrakhan collar of his overcoat. Between them, Stash lifted his hacked face to the fore. He was in *his city* once again!

A little brusque with the two old fellows, he had the impatient feeling at times that they had tagged after him. Although in truth he had first been convinced of the merits of Scarbro's "*Shaneen*" and had promised to make the venture with him in Detroit—where with McCandlish's help it might have a decent opening. But Scarbro had foolishly leaked to old Maunsell, who had been in the storehouse for years, and who came fuming along with his fruity ingratiat-

tion—his windy Wolf Tone airs—his endless prating of *The Irish Drama*. He had been tolerated at the *Savoy* for the sake of his daughter—little Mar.

Stash had made several asides to Scarbro with careless wink about being “loaded down”—“lots of baggage,” et cetera; but these had glanced harmlessly from Maunsell’s surface. Setting foot in the lake city galvanized him into reminiscence—of Chauncey Olcott, Andrew Mack and John McCullough. He even told of McCullough’s terrible, insane breakdown in a Detroit theatre with all the implication of having been an eye-witness! Scarbro listened fretfully; but Stash was blunt enough in his:

“Yes, you saw that in the Dramatic Curtain!—come on, we’ve got to get along if we’re going to find that old cheap hotel you remember!”

II

He was glad to get the two installed in the *Griffin House*; and with a shake of his shoulders started out across the city to find McCandlish. He found him leaving the old Wayne Hotel, whose baffling, dull red front loomed into fitting tonality with the dull gray day.

The big man drew him into the lounge and looked him up and down.

“Well-well! Bahoo-hum-hum! Well, I don’t deny it’s a fine surprise, lad! I got your letter, but didn’t suppose you’d be actin’ this quick. But fine I knew you would—or ought to!—after what Miss Andrea told me about your wild time in the baseball. Why don’t you stick to that now?”

“On account of winter!” Stash smiled; “season’s

over!" He could not explain that baseball did not fill his dream of raging glory. His cheeks were flushed from the stinging November air, his dark eyes shone. He had changed even in the last few months: a new power had been added to him, the result perhaps of three months of extraordinary physical success. This bursting aggressiveness had been somewhat the cause of his leaving Durand. . . .

Sartos had been caught appropriating *ad* collections, and Hartranft had publicly scored him for libeling Stash. The vindictive little man had then resorted to Jastrow's saloon, and worked upon the feelings of old Jastrow, who had hated the name of Plazarski ever since Jan had killed his son. The Jastrow gang had caught Stash and trussed him in the deserted Koban Lake church one night, leaving him with the promise that they would fire it. Out of this had come the Saturday night fights between the Jastrow gang and the Carnarvon roughs—whom Varsh had organized for vengeance. Fentree had begged Stash to quit the Carnarvon gang, had urged him to leave town if there was no other way of courageously avoiding it. Marika too had begged him to give it up. And here he was: without doubt a different fellow from the boy who had left the city a few short months before.

McCandlish agreed to be over in the evening to interview Scarbro.

"Understand," he said, "I'm makin' no promises. . . . If some good bookin' turns up, I'm sort of obligated to that friendly old fellow—myself—to sign on. . . . Unless I took a *strong* fancy to this little show you're pullin' together. But it's an off-chancy game. That name, the Tunnel, never did the house any good—soundin' like a beer-cellar an' all. It smells

musty. I expect it's the center for the rat conventions of the city. If I promoted it as such, an' collected on 'em, I expect I'd be doin' better by myself—if it only brought a bushel of old cheese rinds—than by goin' in on this project of yours. . . . Heh?" His watery gray eyes beetled out at Stash lugubriously.

Stash's brow was knotting itself into pinkish wind-bitten bunches.

McCandlish suddenly laughed and clapped him on the shoulder thunderously: "But fine I know how you take to that—a kid! I'm just an old kid myself. I have a lot of confidence in your drive and go. You've all the fortune favor of youth, and you'll end by havin' your way with me—an old mush! . . . Bahoo!—past seven, then." He enveloped Stash's big hand in his burly bear paw.

III

Stash returned to the *Griffin House* and found Scarbro and Maunsell arguing in a lobby muggy with steam heat and sticky as to leather chairs. It appeared that they were disputing pettishly merely to stifle depression, for they were pathetically happy to have Stash between them again with his load of news.

Against their protest Stash started out to find Lee Luders. He had bought himself a little fruit on the train; and, too impatient to bother with further lunch, he swung on through streets of paper-box factories and seed houses, with lonely lost electric glimmers suggesting wintry comfort high in their lofts of gloom; on through vague drifts of sweetish coal reek and spates of rainy wind. And all through him was the thrill of being here again—in his City—of oh so many boyish dreams and memories. He walked

out of his way to catch a glimpse of the gray stormy straits and saw the black catafalque of a Grand Trunk car ferry surging its way across to Canada.

He found Lee Luders in Kretuski's; and that cool sufficient fellow greeted Stash warmly, submitting both hands to Stash's terrible grip.

“Well, old Sheenie!” said Stash endearingly.

“I knew you would come yet, Blockhead!” The bland Luders had never allowed himself a more affectionate greeting for Stash.

“Well, I got the old fellow that wrote the jingle for ‘She Doesn't Like to Talk About Herself.’ With the music show he's got the book and stuff for, there's a great chance. Especially if I line up McCandlish the way I hope. He's going to be over at the Griff to-night, and we're going to talk it all over. You——”

“No, I won't be there.” Luders shook his head, smiling wisely; and proceeded to explain the superior craft of coming in later as *the man who has to be sent for*.

“I see—all right!—I see!” Stash grinned at this diplomacy which seemed a kind of clever monkey-shines to him.

“What's the name of the book?”

“*Shaneen*,” said Stash, “Irish stuff.”

“Have You Seen *Shaneen*?”—Luders whirled aside with hands in his pockets, and rolled his hard sapphire eyes upward as though gazing at a billboard legend: “Have You Seen *Shaneen*?”—with all the comic aplomb of actual vision.

He turned back to Stash: “That's fine, boy; and I'm ready with a bunch of idears just like I told you; I've got a back-stage card for Frontenac and Majestic and I havn't been wasting it; but yet y'see I can't come

to-night like I was crazy to be on, so you won't mind I hope."

"Not a bit!" Stash grinned; "I'll remember how to bring your name in—like a fellow we might get if he hadn't too many other schemes on hand."

"That's the idear!" Luders declared, "only that's exactly true about all my schemes!"

IV

Stash had looked up the Andrew Fentree address before he left Kretuski's. Andre could hardly believe her eyes when she saw him, and said she would have to turn on the hall light to make sure.

"It needs to be on anyway. . . ." She found her voice trembling out of control. He seemed so different—bigger!

But they were soon quite their old selves. Stash lit the fire in the grate, which soon recalled the room from its lofty Italian coolness, and made the windy outside with its low gray roaring seem a distant far-away world.

"Have you seen your mother?" Andre asked during a pause.

"She's in Buffalo now," said Stash, his face sobering and hardening; "she didn't want me to come around here—so, of course . . . Anyway, she's moved."

"You're going to stay to dinner," said Andre, swinging quickly to a new drift.

"Well, you see——" Stash objected, "I've got a couple old hams on my hands that might run away!—and get lost down Hamtramck way. Old Maunsell talks as if he'd been here lots before—but he leaked out that he'd been in New York on the same dates!" He

laughed again, and in rising spirits consented to stay to dinner.

He found the company jolly enough. Uncle Andrew refrained from his book—which was always just under the tablecloth fringe for choice nipping. Archie and Noll Fentree told the gossip from the automobile shops.

Stash, in his turn, described the hypothetical tragedy of “two old hams lost down Hamtramck.” He told the plans for *Shaneen*. He imitated Luders staring at an imaginary broadside—“Have you seen Shaneen?”—Then broke off abruptly, his eyebrows lifted in pleased astonishment: “Well——! How’s that for a name for the show? *Have You Seen Shaneen?* Gives you something to wonder about.”

Andre took exception, urging that *Shaneen* was a better bull’s-eye. “The other is more cheap and catchy.”

“You’ve said just what we want!” Stash laughed. “Besides, if you saw just *Shaneen* you might think it was something to polish your shoes.”

“Or a new kind of *peau de sois*,” added Aunt Blaine.

Stash apologized for leaving early, and hurried off to the humid lobby of the *Griffin*. McCandlish arrived but a little later; and Scarbro fidgeted around until he got them up to his room, where the precious libretto and score were hidden under his mattress.

v

After McCandlish had listened to Scarbro’s fussy details of how long he had worked on his opus, he interrupted good-naturedly: “But of course I’ll have to read your book—I better be takin’ it home with me to-night.”

Scarbro immediately became distraught.

"Havn't you two copies?" Stash asked brusquely.

Scarbro's lips pattered in exasperation: "Of course not," he muttered, "I had thought that—I could read it, you see—sketch it over——"

McCandlish threw up his hands in mock alarm: "I'd get a better opinion of it if you didn't. I go to sleep when people read to me—fact! Are there any snappy lines in it, heh?"

"*There aren't!*" said Scarbro doggedly, "I've heard enough of that kind of stuff; this' a clean little Irish theme."

"Bahoo-bahoo!" chuckled McCandlish, shaking the great rondure of his vest, "misunderstanding!—I meant has it snap and fire. I want the music sparklin' and fresh too. I'm a good judge. Let's see—there's a piano down at the Tunnel—*Princess*, I mean. But the cold will be a nuisance."

"Not when I'm playing!" muttered Scarbro feverishly, "I never notice it!"

"To *me*—no!" cried Maunsell, loosing a thunderbolt of reassurance, "no nuisance at all!"

"But how about me!—I'd like to know!" McCandlish burst out explosively, "listening back in Row K—K for cold!"

He glared about him with his watery, jocose gray eyes till Scarbro and the old actor expressed a certain humility, and then burst into hoarse asthmatic rumbblings of laughter.

VI

The next afternoon McCandlish came over and relieved the feverish Scarbro by showing the "*Shaneen*" book intact. They foregathered again in the old

musician's room, where he sat down trembling on his bed.

“Wel-l-l!” rumbled the Scotsman, “it brings a kin’ of breath off the heather—or whatever you have over there. So far we’ll call it O. K. Then, after an excitin’ start, you get to missing something—betimes. I don’t know just what’s the matter—but from my readin’ of Sir Walter’s plots . . . I have them all in a book that saves readin’ the novels . . . I can be sure of something wrong. . . .”

Scarbro was working his fingers on the counterpane; and it looked to Stash as if tears of chagrin were creeping into his eyes. Maunsell, his loose lavender lips working, looked helplessly to Stash.

Stash sprang upright.

“I know what it wants!” He claimed their attention abruptly: “You know how Shaneen is named after her dead brother! I’d have her dressin’ up like a boy then for mischief and to spy on the King’s Revenue men. Now the jolly old smuggler that’s an old friend of Captain Murtree—he carries her off to a secret spot, thinkin’ to help Murtree that loves her. All right! But when Murtree hears she’s been carried off he’s scared to death!—

“And all the smugglin’ town is yammerin’ round sly like: ‘Have you seen Shaneen?’ *They* won’t tell Murtree she’s safe at Secret Rock!—cause Murtree, bein’ English captain, has got to support the Revenue men, and they’re afraid he’ll bam the old smuggler boy! . . . But the old smuggler boy’s his secret friend, and tells young Murtree where to find the girl and cut away! That’s what we needed to dress out the third act. You can see now that it was coming!”

“Now you *see* it you can!” laughed McCandlish.

Stash hurled a warning look at Scarbro and dashed on: "I wasn't *worried*—knew we'd have to do a lot of cutting!"

Scarbro squirmed helplessly under Stash's scalpel.

"May have to do a *lot of cutting!* But it's a good play! *I* saw. And *you*——" turning to McCandlish—"saw it too!—Or you'd a' dropped it dead, wouldn' you! . . . And when you hear the songs you'll think you've touched something hot!"

His air of triumph flushed McCandlish with contagious pleasure: "I wouldn't say you weren't precisely right! We'll be hearin' the songs to-morrow at one. If they'll be anyways near as good as the play . . . now you've got the kink tripped out. . . . Want to warn you!—I'm a judge of music. . . . I feel it first right here!"—tapping the solar ganglia under his great vest. "Hold on though! . . . we'll make it earlier—at ten—and I'll have you to lunch with me if you care."

There was such a rush of approval in the big man's words—stemmed so suddenly by abortive cautions—that Scarbro started and fluttered at every word.

After McCandlish was gone, the old leader caught Stash back to mutter his trembling thanks: "In a little while Slason would have been trying to shove me off. . . . And there's nothing else I can do! . . ."

"Cheer up!" Stash patted his shoulder protectively, "we've got 'em on the run."

In the lobby they met Maunsell with head erectly leonine and a fresh cigar pursed in his expressive heliotrope lips.

CHAPTER II

I

The morning turned out bright and blowing. An amber autumn sunshine patched the pavement at the Woodward entrance of the *Princess Playhouse*. McCandlish blustered them into the echoing arcade tunnel that led half a block deep to the theatre.

Whether the singing beauty of the "*Shaneen*" songs would get across to McCandlish was a worry that beset Scarbro the moment they started out.

The first attempt proved the need of some decisive intervention—human or divine—to win a word of favor from the grunting fellow stuffed in his cold corner of Row K. The rose-geranium mustiness charged Stash with a queer echoing feeling, as if some haunt of his old self must hover in the gallery corner where he and Lee used to sit, and where now only sad gray shadows met his eye. . . . The big prospect seemed decaying into a musty memory—in company with dead exaltations that haunt old theatres on raw November mornings. Scarbro's chagrin, as he swung out from the piano and waited, was more than Stash could stand. He sprang down from the chairback where he had been sitting.

"See here!" his voice startled the echoes, "isn't the next one Murtree's song to Shaneen? I'll sing that if you want me to. If it won't scare Mac out!"

McCandlish toppled both hands through the air in a "do anything you please to me" gesture.

Maunsell pulled his veined hands out of his overcoat to spatter them and mutter "Bravo!"

So Stash squared off beside the piano, determined to gather the wreck in his arms, if wreck it must be, and hurl it at the grumpy old turtle in Row K.

"Play your damn best, Scar!" he muttered aside; and struck into the chorus:

"Just as ye've seen the waves, Shaneen,
Curl up on Bantry's shore—
That's just how dear your eyes are seen,
The lashes curlin' o'er!
More like the waves of peacock sheen
Stealin' to Bantry's shore—
That's just the way your eyes ain't green—
But more like blue, Asthore!
That's just the way your eyes trick mine!
Shaneen—Shaneen Asthore!"

In the sudden silence that followed, McCandlish shook himself up enough to grunt: "Well, that ought to be gettin' her betimes!"

"That's nothing!" Stash swaggered, "wait till you hear the Smuggler's Chorus!"

For the Smuggler's Chorus he sprang to the stage apron, and tromped it out. Staggering, stamping, rocking, rolling, he made a whole chorus of himself.

"And now I tell you something's happening," said McCandlish, lumbering out of his chair and down the ramp.

Stash whirled into "Fancy Goods."

"Oh, niver iny smugglin' is there
Round about here—
But maybe in the fancy line!
There was a poor lad that went
A talkin' fine—
How smugglin' niver-iver paid,
But sorry a smile did he get, poor lad,
Till he wint in the conthraband trade!
(Business of kissing)
Engagin' in the conthraband trade!"

By the time Stash had drawn the last corkscrew kiss and done a dainty bend and fade-away, McCandlish was shaking with laughter. He cleared his throat with a gigantic *Bahoo!* and paced softly up and down while Scarbro played the next two songs.

They concluded with undimmed esprit, and Scarbro turning round lit a cigarette, sending a spiral thread of blue aloft.

"Well, sir!" McCandlish cleared his throat. This was what they were waiting for—tensely. "It surely brings a breath off the heather—or, as I was sayin'—whatever vegetation they have over there—blackthorns and gallus-trees. . . . I won't sign a contract till I learn more what it's goin' to set me back to get a company, director an' all. . . . But I will say this. . . . That you thawed me out something fine. . . . Or maybe it was the sun workin' up. . . . I doubt it's blowin' like it was. . . . *Jondui's* ain't far down . . . where the roast beef tree grows strong."

Maunsell ran his bluish-pebbled tongue around his chapped lips; and they pushed out into the bright bluster of the autumn noon.

II

The savors of steaks and colored sauces made the window bay at *Jondui's* a fair roadstead just off the bright street.

"And whom you been thinkin' of for lady lead?" McCandlish turned to Scarbro.

Scarbro blinked and muttered an exalted name.

"Thunder!" breathed Stash, "she ranks the whole flutter! Why don't you ask for *Mitzi*—to pass programs!"

176 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

A grievous gaze from Maunsell accused Scarbro of rankest desertion.

"How about little Mar's chance?" said Stash, "she that has the regular Madge Stair sparkle in her eye. If she had a try-out she'd make the chorus anyway. And look how she'd wipe up Shaneen's boy appearance!—that way she slunks around just like a fellow!"

"*I see!*" sighed Maunsell in piteous irony, "*I see*—we had no chance—no opening from the start." He bowed his head like a ruined mastiff.

"Lord!" Stash cried, "you're just the shape for the old top that's always workin' up to a fine speech on himself and Ireland when Shaneen taps him on the shoulder—for fear he'll give away the secret. I've been seeing that all along!"

Maunsell's mouth assumed a dubious degree of complacency.

It amused and somehow pleased McCandlish to see Stash assume the weight of these old chaps' dejection and a responsibility for them. He told himself with pride that the big lad had a big heart in him.

III

Before the luncheon was over Stash had let out his arm in the matter of Lee Luders in such fashion that had that blandly assured fellow been by he must have exclaimed: "Excellent for you, boy!"

Stash hurried back to the *Griffin* to help Scarbro work over the book; and the next evening took Luders to dine with McCandlish at the *Tiller Grill*.

"Well," the Scotsman gruffed, after they were seated, "the lad tells me you've been dead-heading in

back at the Frontenac, learnin' the show business. What do you know?"

Luders—to Stash's exultation—was not in the least disconcerted.

"With just this kind of play in view I been in the habit of attending the Polish and Irish picnics. I never miss the points of the best dancers seen there; an' even list 'em, so that from Clan Na Gael an' County Mayo an' such I have collected a list that will be dressin' the choruses of to-morrow. So you see we get in before the cream is skimmed, so that for your present venture which is Irish you couldn't make a mistake in lookin' up these girls, a list of which I have here; and on your four-sheets, 'A Chorus with Smiles as Irish as Their Names' wouldn't look so bad."

He was so blandly brazen in the wink he gave Stash, as he handed over the list of names, so amazingly serene in his conjuration of chorus recruits, that McCandlish had to swallow one or two *bahoos* before he could recapture his usual phlegm.

"Take my word," said Luders, "it would be a pleasure simply with such material to whip 'em into shape."

"I notice y' havn't begrudged slippin' in a few French names too—Flaherty and McCormick?"

Luders dismissed the big man's joking attempt with a wave of the hand: "Those two McCormicks are sisters and smart little girls enough, that I have talked to them and they are really crazy, y'know, to dance on the stage."

"That's not a bad idea either about 'smiles as Irish as their names.'"—In this fashion McCandlish committed himself gruffly in Luders' favor; and later accepted his suggestion that a New York director of

178 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

Corporal Maggard's reputation be hired to cast the play and give it a fly-by-night supervision.

When they had parted from the big man and watched his burly figure diminish under the blue pleached branches of *Grand Circus Park*, Stash muttered: "Why didn' you give ol' Mac his laugh on that French-Irish joke?"

"Whatever far-off circuit they're enjoyin' that joke on——" Luders raised a red flare to his cigarette—"on Mars perhaps, I'd say a fellow ought to be forgiven for not chokin' himself over it here; besides that I learned long ago, my boy, that it raises a man's respect if you don't choke over his stale old dog-biscuit jokes, because that you're too blame busy or don't have to 'take a bend' every time he snaps his finger."

Looking at Lee's serene rounded cheek, Stash had to chuckle, as one chuckles at the impudence of a favorite dog.

CHAPTER III

I

The triumph of the days when the first four-sheets came out and "HAVE YOU SEEN SHANEEN?" bloomed on *Chandos* and *Jefferson* billboards was submerged in the frenzy and desperation of the last week.

Under McCandlish's guidance Stash became business manager. And in addition, he was held to help the electrician with his light cue schedule, to remedy a squeaky curtain block, or again to fill in for "Carmody." His eyes grew bloodshot and his face knotted.

One night Andre caught him and tore him away to the house on Chandos Street for dinner.

There he told them in excited rush of the fine “sell-out,” of old Maunsell’s dash and go as the ancient sweetheart, of *Silliman & Shott’s* offer to sign them on for thirty weeks’ booking if the show proved a draw. Even Uncle Andrew let *his book* slip to the floor.

“And to think it all started that drizzly November day that you came here!” said Andre.

“It wasn’t drizzly!” Stash laughed, “you’re throwin’ in contrast. It was a fine old day. The big thing was that old Scar built a winner somehow. He couldn’t tell you how he did it! Then Dimmick grilled ’em to a Broadway curve—with old Lee defending ’em till the girls think he’s *so sweet*. And then he works Dimmick’s own tricks—pianissimo at first, and then harder, harder! . . . Oh, they don’t know all his smartness!”

Before he left Stash stopped at the piano, and poisoning his big winter-reddened hands above the white keys—struck a carnival chord full of the mellowness of gay good-bye—and something of its sadness too.—The touch of Irish tristesse just deep enough to make the flashing cheer of finale linger on with a pull of wistful longing.

“That’s the last lyric—‘To the Lave of You.’” He turned away. “Renwick’s putting ’em out after New Year’s. Peachy covers—you know the fellow designed ’em, Andre—Janvier, eh?”

He laughed; shook hands; and hurried out into the blue December night—full of dying holiday rumors like the final lyric of “Have You Seen Shaneen?”

II

But Stash's troubles weren't all over. The evening of the opening he met Scarbro at a Portage Street chop-house not far from the theatre, where the old fellow had invited him for dinner. His huddled brown figure had haunted the darkness of the *Princess* house for weeks; for the last month he had been shivering and sniffing with a cold which he had treated with nothing but "rock and rye," finding himself now on the eve of his play in a feverish and distraught condition.

Beginning with a trembling attempt to tell all that this night of his dreams meant to him, he worked excitedly onward to the astounding declaration that he had stolen the play.

"You know how I work! You've seen me get Kittl and Komzhak songs around me and work out a new one. Just the same with this. . . . Stolen every one! To-morrow . . ." his voice shook with apprehension, "they'll point out where I got this and that one—'Moonlight Lad' from Balfe—'Fancy Goods' from Herbert—I'll be—I'll be exposed—there'll be suits! I—I'm finished!——"

Stash was half angry, half aghast: "Nonsense! You know—before a song's hardly out—the minute professional copies get around—the first thing we say is—'That's a pretty good crib from *Dollikins* or whatever!' That junk's always goin' the circuit! Cheer up!" He leaned forward to pat the shaky old shoulder.

But some frustrated romantic spirit buried in the dreary pit of the man, as he had been buried in the

dingy Savoy pit, had worked out on this the great dramatic night of his life and demanded a tragic accent.

“It’s all over to-morrow! You ought to see!—I stole from you! You helped me vamp up the lyrics. *I—I’ve tried to keep the feeling down!—but now——*”

“O’ course! O’ course!” Stash muttered coaxingly, “I know, I know how it is, Scarry! . . . All the trouble is,” and his eyes gleamed black, “it’s going to be all so *wonderful grand a thing*, Scarry, that you *can’ believe* it’s coming all to you!”—He sprang up and pressed a hand gently on the trembling shoulders. “See—Scar? . . . That’s the way it seems to me! And we’ve both got the jimmies hard! But we can’ bother about it just now! You see it’s getting seven-fifteen already.”

He helped him into his things, muttering in gentle gruffness little tags from the play: “‘There—now easy on with the old wrap-rascal!’”—smoothing his arms into the sleeves of his skimpy, scorched looking overcoat.

Out under the frosty sky then, with its countless sparkling stars, to the rendezvous of the old leader’s dreams.

CHAPTER IV

I

The ground sheets were rumbling out with a tremor like distant cannon limbers when Stash reached back stage. He swung onto a trestle of the Smuggler’s Cave set, and whistled softly, eerily, as he

182 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

had in the old *gallery nights*. Ah, what a thrill now in those old memories!

Presently McCandlish came in with the older McCormick sister and the twins, Clare and Dollie, all heavily wrapped against the frosty air.

The burly fellow swung about beside Stash: "The old man looks bumbazed to-night." In truth Scarbro did look lost and bewildered.

"I'm going to try to get him down by the furnace!" Stash sprang up and swung across.

Most of the girls had arrived before seven-fifteen. The loft echoed with their laughing calls.

Stash came back and perched on a trestle beside little Mar. Her forehead was puckered with mingled delight and worry. "Is that the S. and S. man with Luders?" she asked hurriedly.

"That's him," said Stash; "notice his spatterdashers!"

"Why, Pally, they're a whole spot battery! You might as well ask me have I seen Crowly's peach and cream throat-protector!"

It happened that Crowly stood just behind them. Stepping forward, with hand to breast, he husked: "It is I?"

Mar giggled: "I'm truly ashamed!"

"Good!—good!" said he.

"Bon! bon!" Mar paraphrased, "those are words no Frenchman fails to understand."

Crowly bowed and presented gravely his box of menthol cough-drops.

"They save the voice, but drug the soul," said Mar, taking one. "How's yours?—I don't mean the last—that you have none of!"

"You can hardly mean my voice!" sibilated Crowly,

favoring his throat as though it were a boil; "Plazarski will have to throw me the rope."

At this Stash kicked up his heels and threatened to fall over backward.

Dimmick's whistle purred viciously. Like colored fire-flies against the dusk of the fly galleries the last girls flittered down from the dressing-rooms. In a few minutes now the first call would come. Phantom violin chords were lost in the dull bourdon of the rising house. The girls were stuttering to the peep-hole on tingling toes—and falling back with gestures of nervous abandon.

The first ensemble was called.

In the dusk of the right entrance Stash caught the sound of pinched breathing, the dainty crepitation of costumes, a distant taroo-bahoo pianissimo. He smelled the fragrance of romantic dust—stale but yesterday—exalted now into perfume by the fragility of the magic moment—like the arm powders, the grease paint, the quaint flaws of soapy perfume from newly washed hair. He was chewing the corner of his lip . . . the bell rang. . . .

From the mouth of the cavern swept twenty-four young voices in a storm of high sweet ringing.

II

At the end of the act the curtain ran down to a thunder of applause. Back-stage was an indescribable confusion. One moment Stash heard McCandlish rumbling in his ear: "We've got the hank over 'em!"

And the next thing he knew—Crowly was whispering—"You've got to do it, man! . . ."

Stash threw out his hand in protest.

Mar clenched his arm: "You've got—got—got—got to! It's you or nothing, Pally!" Luders slapped his shoulder.

His brain in a high humming, Stash plunged away to *Carmody's* dressing-room. It had come to him . . . his great chance! The royal madness swept in to his call—rocked him out on the first long roller of the new sea.

He glanced into the mirror above the make-up shelf. He looked the part—a dashing young smuggler leader. The jaunty tatterdemalion costume swept him away—into another land.

He stood in the *first right* now, with Luders and Mac whispering encouragement: "Listen, my boy—to let your voice swell out like when you don't give a damn for anybody—that's the way!——"

"Cleck into it, birkie!" gruffed McCandlish, "ding into it!"

The blood was pounding in Stash's temples. The thought had come to him that the whole enterprise was waiting on him to know itself a triumph—or—— "Well—well!" he whispered, "I can't bother 'bout all that!"

Once out there, his lines rushed from him with an ease and dash that amazed him. And now came his meeting with Mar. He saw that her eyes were cheering him—*hurrahing* for him—with their Madge Stair sparkle so magnetic.

His song approached: "Moonlight Lad." Before the background of Bantry Bay—where riding-lights trembled afar—he stood in Ireland; and in the soft blue moonlight flood stood little Mar beside him. But the air he swam in was the night air of the crossroads beyond Koban Lake. And his mind swung out to the

gipsy freedom of those song filled nights with Varsh and old Karshenko.

Without the sharp gust of applause, he would have known by Mar's eyes that he had scored. . . .

The stage grew softly light—pale morning had come, and the time for his other song. Riding-lights now flickered faint on Bantry Bay.

"Ock, I'm sad an' grievin', Little Butterfly—
 Sure, it's simply owin' all to you!
 Wouldn't raise my hand if heaven's ceilin'
 Was fallin' through!
 Sure, I think an angel broke that roofin'
 Wrapped herself up in a scrap of blue—
 Ava! I've spoke a sin!—and let it be one thin!
 'Twas always in my father's fam'ly—
 To be shoutin' '*Let the roof fall in.*'"

Came Dermody's voice across the dawn:

"When you see me flicker—flutter by!"—
 —Your Butterfly!"

The curtain rang down again—and again; but the house wouldn't be satisfied till Stash and Dermody had bowed in a blue spot clearing to white—like fairyland sweeping deep into earthly dawn. Then Stash and Mar . . . then Mar and Bellews.

III

First night was a complete triumph. Scarbro was called for; but he was found asleep—or in a feverish coma. . . . Stash slapped old Maunsell, who was weltering in distracted elation, and promised that he would take care of Scarry and get him home.

With a sense of shock and disillusion he found the old leader in his short scorched overcoat wavering de-

liriously on his arm—out through the deserted frosty foyer—into the crystal cold of a city of dying holiday rumors, where the old man's night of triumph had dwindled in a haze. Far down the blue twinkling depth of a cross street a faint whistling rang . . .

“'Twas always in my father's fam'ly—
To be shoutin'—Let the roof fall in!”

CHAPTER V

I

Stash had fairly to fight with Luders for the time to attend Scarbro in the muggy, fever pungent room; where he opened and shut windows, chafed the old fellow's hands and told him the Tunnel talk or read the favorable reviews.

He was playing “*Carmody*” now; Crowly having thrown it up through Luders' clever forcing. For that cool fellow would stand no “funny stuff” as he called it, and ruled the company with a grip of iron. The agreement with *Silliman & Shott* gave him a power that favored their dictation through his covert and sympathetic alliance with them. Together they were out to make it pay; and it was paying. The songs were out and ringing all over the city in those first bright weeks of January. The day Stash left on the twelve weeks' tour he pulled Scarbro to the window to hear someone in the street whistling “Ask Me Just Again.”

A week later the company in Toledo learned of his death. And Stash had his first quarrel with Luders because of his angry shame that Lee had kept him away from the old leader.

II

When the tour ended in June it was too late to go into training with Skanlock's team; but Stash was cheerfully reconciled to helping McCandlish in his Mackinac office. His abruptness, his power of quick decision, were just the essentials for this work. After a week's introduction he took charge of the office; McCandlish returning to Detroit.

At times, as he thought of how he might have been in Durand, a queer sense of longing gripped his heart. Sometimes he neglected answering Marika's letters from the resentful feeling that she was abetting the sadness which had always bothered him since a tiny boy in the dreary old hotel. She told him news of his brother too. And he was reminded of how in the midst of all his enterprises he had shown so little care for old Varsh. The most he had ever done for him had been to smash up the fixtures in Jastrow's saloon in rage over Varsh's drunken humiliation in that hole. He chuckled, a little shamefully, over this. Yes, that was about the best he had done; Varsh and he had grown so much different from each other now.

It clashed queerly with his growing estrangement from Durand to look suddenly one evening into the face of Rose Maddon. Her eyes crinkled with teasing delight as she called to him from the overhang of a smart little sloop.

"Stash Plazarski!"

"Not if I can catch this breeze!" shouted a big dark-haired fellow who saw her move toward the landing-stage. But the breeze was dawdling, and Stash had

sprung to catch Rose's hand and swing her over. His heart was pounding joyously.

They watched the sloop stand out lazily into the rosy evening light.

"Maybe you'd have looked prettier out there," said Stash, "but I'm glad you took the jump, Rose Maddon. Just saying your name makes me feel I'm in Durand again."

They walked slowly on, up the mounting bluff walk, talking of old times. Turning, they looked back down upon the lilac and purple mystery of the harbor and the confetti bright lights that pricked the hotel phalanx.

"To-morrow night at this time we'll be on board the *Great Northern*—— So it's good-bye, until——" she hummed lightly—"Until Another Time," from *Shan-keen*.

"Did you see it?" Stash asked eagerly.

"Certainly—in Cleveland—and a second-rate affair it was."

"Couldn't have been our company then!" said Stash.

"But it was—because I saw 'Stan Plazarski' on the bill, just as in the Savoy days—and I saw you singing 'Moonlight Lad.'"

"*Did!*—— Well, I havn't any foolish notions about it. It's a second-rate production; but it's a jolly thing, and we're on for forty weeks' booking next year. But won't you even say you liked my work?"

"I will," said Rose, with charming gravity, "because I did. You sort of took hold of my throat in 'Moonlight Lad.'"

"I'm ashamed of myself," chuckled Stash, "never did that to a lady before!"

"And one reason I'm so interested," said Rose, "—if

you'll just let a little learner talk about herself—I'm going for voice this year—to Vienna. Dad says I can have the new house—or Vienna and voice. Just like a restaurant choice—coffee and Viennas—or—I told him I'd take Vienna—and I wouldn't come home until he had a new house for me to come to. That's my choice!"

"What!—leave the Castle!" Stash exclaimed.

"The Castle!—everybody makes fun of it—even you—if you'd tell——"

He couldn't keep the reminiscent twinkle from his eye: "No, I thought it was grand-prop . . . But I sort of remember Ced Morf saying—'If Rose would get up bright and early some morning she could have that tower most chopped down by noon!'"

"There!——" she laughed with a sputter of chagrin, "you sort of remember all too well! I've heard that Fentrees will build on Traverse Hill if Imbrie's mine pays. Dad says he's gotten in pretty deep—Mr. Fentree."

"Fen!—is that so! I wish I could get down there!—and see them all. . . ."

"Who is it really lures you back to old slapdash town?"

"Who? . . . well, maybe I want to go down to hear Carniola Ban play his black fiddle! In every one of Marika's letters old Varika puts in a message that I ought to come down an' hear this Big Ban play his black fiddle! Blue-black, he claims, as a Czigane girl's hair!"

"Who is this Ban?" Rose smiled questioningly.

"A fellow from Hungary. The Turks stole him away in Carniola—for a ransom."

"Carniola!—what a beauty name!"

Stash smiled: "You hear such names at Hartranft's all the time! This fellow Ban slipped away with a gipsy troupe—and came across, playing. One day came wandering down the road to Varika's—and Varika simply won't let him go."

Rose Maddon sighed: "Somehow everything you did down there, and lived, seems more interesting than anything I ever had."

They drifted back towards the hotels and the harbor, now sinking in dusk and shadows—as blue-black as Carniola Ban's violin.

III

The next morning he saw her off—with her father. She introduced Stash as "the boy that welcomed me to Durand the first day he came to town . . . Serenaded me by daylight . . . it was extremely modern—I stood in the mouth of a steel stack—your own little Rosemary. He loves Durand so much he wants to be pain-killer in your bank."

"Payin' teller!" Maddon laughed heartily. "Some girls, Mr. Plazarski, come round their fathers with petting and pussyng. But Rose pulls my leg with her jokin' chatter. More natural, you see."

"Or farther seeing," Stash smiled. The happy but proud restraint of his manner before Rose's father did not prevent the dark eyes shooting a wicked gleam at Rose. In his white flannels and blue coat he looked like a dark, bronzed prince from Southern Europe traveling incog.—except for the sun-scorched hair.

Her dancing cerulean eyes tossed back his challenge: "Do you remember," she said, "that time in the Court House at Durand when I said—Wouldn't it be?—and

gave a pause for you to say—'*Wouldn' what?*' You always left off the *t*. It used to be pretty amusing to trap you into saying *didn'*—and easy too!"

Stash assumed his attitude of somewhat lofty but quizzical restraint, looking at her hawkishly, questioningly: "That will be pretty nice to think about—that I've given you fun. I'll think about it when you're in Europe."

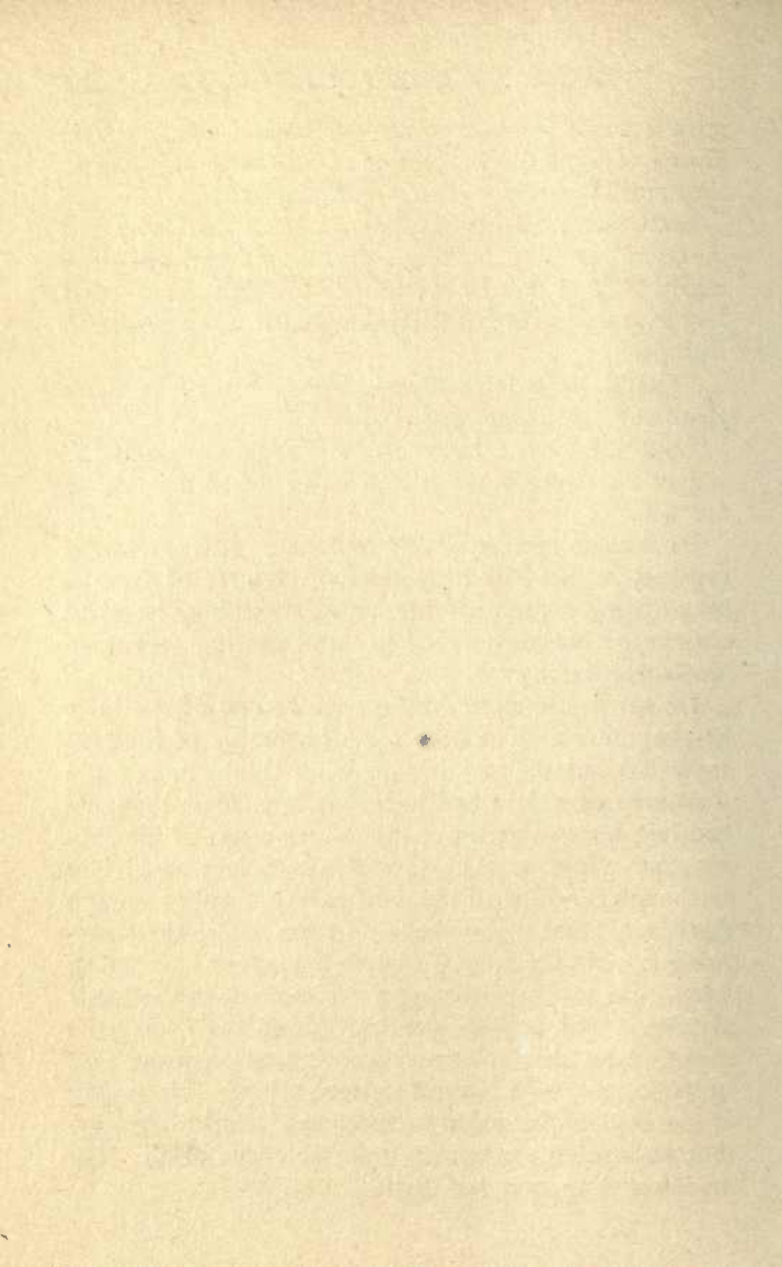
"That'll be a long time—because I may be there years and years—eh, dad?"

Appealed to, her father said: "We'll see about it."

Her last word was: "You never asked me to sing for you."

He made a gesture of self-reproach. It was a lonely evening, haunted by little shifting pictures of Rose—by startling rumors of her voice, swinging the vivid corners of his memory of her and bearing fast upon him—then fading far.

He sat in a distant deep corner of one of the lofty hotel verandas. The deep far-off booming of the *Hu-ronic* did not distract his gnawing thinking, nor did the flurry of voices and hurrying feet. His thoughts had left Rose to seek out the deeper cause of his aching discomfort; and he saw Marika's face as vividly as though it whitened the dark before him—as though the hot summer moon shone on them where the cross-roads lay—in the dusk—beneath the alders—by Koban Lake. He saw her listening for him through the Ban's playing. And in a sudden passion of hot dismay he saw that he already thought of her as someone that he had agreed with himself to leave behind. He sprang up; he couldn't bear that feeling; and joined the groups that watched the gemmed, majestic curve of the *Hu-ronic* standing in to her berth.



BOOK SIX: MARIKA OF THE CROSSROADS

CHAPTER I

I

Stash had reached the end of a second Mackinac summer. His elation in leaving the ticket-broking office grew as the night trip south brought him nearer and nearer Detroit. He was approaching the city of his boyish dreams in royal consort: for Diblee of the old *Lady Island* crowd, of the lazy magnificent manner, had attached himself to Stash during an idle week in the old fort town.

It was after midnight when they tapped across the murmurous marble corridors of the new Detroit station and were carried—as though on the wash of the cool night breeze—down blue, deep glimmering avenues, to Diblee's Chittenden Square club. There in a dim lighted upper hall they found themselves in the grip of vindictive welcome. Chairs crashed. Bedroom doors of the old demoded mansion boomed resentfully. Turbaned and bath-robed figures attacked; and were borne down by Diblee's great shoulders. He flung them right and left; but fell trapped at last and was hoisted to the hurricane deck of the piano, where he burst vengefully and joyfully into song:

"Then from his warm bed
 We will urge a man—
 Some nice gentle
 Kindly old clergyman—
 Who when wide awake
 Will not grieve
 To turn out for me!"

"There's my Jerome Kern backfire," he laughed;
 "Plazarski's turn!"

"Plazarski to the bridge!" announced the thin-faced fellow called Tallant, "the Smuggler's song!"

Stash sprang to the top: "Who'll throw me my old wrap-rascal?" he called. Someone hurled him an oriental drape from a model's throne. "We're off!" he warned.

After the tumult of approval, a full chorus was demanded.

"Bear on, all hands," Diblee sang out, "let the moon and all the rest the dooryard planets hear!"

't seemed to Stash that these must have heard; but when later he looked from the room Diblee had paged him to, they burned steadfastly above the dreaming square. There had been glorious high jinks; and Stash thanked Diblee and the three men who had followed down the hall with arms looped about each other's shoulders.

"We can't help ourselves," said Tallant, "some of us are born to charm."

"He merely shouts it in your ear," said Diblee; "well, let's rouse the preacher once more, for luck."

They passed down the hall singing:

"Then from his warm bed
 We will urge a man—
 Some nice gentle
 Crafty old clergyman—"

Their whistling throbbed away through the halls and died out. . . . Stash felt as if he had been taken into an Arabian Night of good fellowship—and Diblee the friendly cool seneschal who had unlocked the door.

II

A fresh lake breeze wakened him by slatting the inside window blinds; and Stash started out to find Andre. He was disappointed when lanky Tav Fentree referred him to Miss Prinzep's Studio on *Corkran* and *Portage*. But Andre's welcome was not disappointing. It was a part with the scurrying lustres of the river, the fresh charm of the city—as if it had renewed itself for the holiday makers now hurrying home from all the Lakes.

Stabbing carelessly at a *tempera* sketch of Quebec, "old town," she told him the latest news of the Prinzeps, of stocky Raoul Janvier, of Lee Luders. . . . "Stash!—he let me write the lyric for a new melody of his."

"Old Lee? Good! I haven't seen him for three months. I didn't know you got along with him."

"But certainly! This melody came to him at the Shabby Lantern. He dared me to write the words. Done! On the back of the same envelope he jotted his *idears* on!"

Stash laughed: "Wenrick get it out?"

"Not yet. Nadelka is going to sing it at the Lantern Friday night. If it goes. . . . Understand, Raoul and Miss Prinzep were with us that night, Stash. I'm not tearing your dear old Lee away. He's such a busy, blue-eyed man! If you stay till Friday night——"

"Sure!—fine!" Stash leapt with approval, "we can go all together."

As he was leaving, Andre suddenly called: "Oh, I almost forgot. The Morfs live here now. And Rose Maddon's with them this week. Back from abroad. You might see her before you leave."

"Yes?" said Stash, a sudden rich singing in his heart prompting him to gay perversity, "she used to be quite a favorite with Mister Fen, didn't she?" And swung off to McCandlish's hotel.

CHAPTER II

I

The wheelman's call on the Lakes—"The lights are bright!"—had been warped to other uses where the darkened river ran below the dancing pier of *The Shabby Lantern*. The legend ran: "The lights are always bright at the Shabby Lantern."

The Lantern itself was barrel shaped and bent, and blinked in orange and lavender. With such a convivial "bush" entertainment should not fall short; nor did it, however tantalizing, in the spasmodic appearance of its petted darling, Nadelka. Nadelka and her black cat: She walked with him to-night between the tables, while he threw disparaging green glances about him or settled against her red bodice.

"She has too much of that careless temperament," Lee Luders sought to reassure Andre about the premiere of their little song, "but for that I have a cure—I'll speak to her if you——"

Andre shook her head decidedly.

"Let me," said Stash; "I can manage her as well as Lee."

"Stash, are you going to act wild to-night?" Andre's tone was apprehensive.

Stash swung off across the long room. They saw him greet Nadelka with an abrupt gesture—saw a smile of sudden recognition cross her face. He came back with a look of secret estrangement darkening his brows. "I knew her," he said; "she was little Ella Seryetski—on Clement—back of us."

Diblee and Tallant called to him from the next table, petitioning effusively for the company of such a marked man: "Shed some your moldy old lustre over us."

"This fat pillar's in the way," Stash smiled. "I can't curve the stuff. . . . Never mind—she's going to sing."

And so it was. She appeared in a small Kiosk-like proscenium of weary Persian colors, and her round voice tore from her throat like something mad with life.

"She's a Mitzi," declared Tallant.

A ruffle of eager applause burst out. There were cries of "Nadelka!" The song was hung out again from the estrade that separated the café from the dancing pier.

Luders raised his cigarette toward Andre in a gesture of assured congratulation: "To us!—I think Wenrick will be on."

"It seemed to go," Andre said lightly; "Stash, they're talking about you!—" She nodded toward the next table.

"I was just saying"—Diblee looked over—"that Plazarski and I are planning a play. He has all the gadgets for warranting it shipshape and AA-1."

"Dib, you must brace yourself," the cadaverous Tal-

lant warned him; "it's the desiah of the morth for the dramar—you'll get singed."

"I'm surprised at you, Pally," said Luders blandly, "that you would let me out on your schemes!"

"I couldn't let you out before it was formed, could I?" Stash answered curtly. "We were just amusing ourselves on the way down." He turned to Andre gruffly: "I thought you said something about phoning the Morfs and Rose Maddon?"

"They *were* coming," Andre replied, and at that moment something tickled her neck. . . . In approaching, Rose had made a sign to Stash, and—tickled Andre with the fur of her evening cape.

II

Stash sprang up to be the first to take her hand. With a ringing of old memory in his heart, he saw that it was the same "Rose Maddon in a shining spot." But time and far distances had not neglected to forge a new shimmer upon her merry marquise fashion. His heart was hammering as he led her towards the pavilion. "I can't ask you to sing here, but . . . Don't you remember—the last thing you said to me? Can't keep it out of your eyes that you remember!"

They stood by the pier railing in the semi-dark, watching the steady beat of ship's lights forging by the glimmering Ontario shore. In time the talk swung to his plans. They were inchoate. McCandlish had sold "Shaneen" to the S. & S. management.

"Mac wants me to go right in and work out something new for a try-out. But I haven't much confidence in myself."

"You mustn't make me laugh, Stash! There isn't anything but that you think you can do. Is there?"

He laughed a little.

"Why don't you do the play for the Durand *Ad Masque*. One of the newspapermen usually gets it . . ."

"Why shouldn't I have a try at it?" Stash exclaimed. "Anyway, I'm coming down—sure!"

After dancing a Komzhak waltz—"Carinthian Roses"—they drifted back to the pier railing again.

"That Komzhak music brings it all back, Stash! Such uniforms—such dancing! I didn't think to tell you—I met an officer from your Carniola, where that wandering boy with his black fiddle came from. I thought of you and last summer on the beach. He was dreadfully stupid."

"I see the connection," said Stash; "doesn't this one sound like our pick?" He referred to the new clash-as-clash-can two-step just ringing out.

"I hadn't noticed that it was." But she yielded quickly, and they were soon swaying down the long shining floor.

III

Later, above the dark slip-slapping water, Stash talked with Andre of her father. She asked him to write her how Fentree was looking.

"I'm worrying about him," she said. "I think Mr. Imbrie's somehow failed him on the mine scheme and now Maddon and Marantle are taking it up. They wouldn't take it up if it wasn't a good thing—And yet I feel there's something wrong about it. You'll tell me if he seems worried or—anything—Stash?—"

Stash assented with a hoarse voice of troubled eager-

ness. "If he was in any difficulty—I, you know, I've got a little something, Andre—it's—it's all his!"

"No—even if he were—it might make him feel—the jig was up. . . . Thank you, Stash." She pressed his arm quickly.

The other groups had come out to watch the shipping a few moments before leaving. Green lights and red pricked out the monstrous slippery shadows.

"We'll be going too," said Andre, taking Miss Prinze's arm, "and Stash——"

"I promised to see Nadelka again," said he, "or, I mean she promised to see me."

"Another fancy, boy!" Luders swung back to shake his hand, "so many in one night that I don't wonder you forget to tell me your plans."

"I'm not bound to tell you my plans," said Stash abruptly, "more than you are to tell me your sleeping agreements with Stilliman and Shott's."

Luders returned in a bland tone: "It's just as I said—'No use'—to old Mac when he advises with me about your erratic way—warning him not to get impatient with you."

Stash's blood began to boil: "You want to be quits with me and shake me with Mac. Try again!"

Luders turned away smiling; and Stash found himself alone with Diblee, and aching with dull misery as he studied a green light drifting by in sullen dreaming.

IV

He found Nadelka ready to advance in supple yielding fashion into his favor, to talk of plays, songs, engagements; but he suddenly cut in with the query:

"Where was it, Delka, you saw my mother, you thought?"

"Yes, I *thought*—that's so—but that's all. Down near where she used to live—the brick house. Couldn't say for sure now, Stash. Why you so worried?"

"I thought she was in Buffalo—I would try to find her if I knew she was staying here. Did she look alone, was she walking?"

"I will tell you," Nadelka settled her lips a little primly, which had a bizarre effect with her fiercely overt style; "walking alone she was, and took a car. As if she had lots of time and no one waiting. A blue and pink hat she wore."

Stash started: "It must have been her." As soon as he could he hurried off. He saw as vividly as in a trance or calcium light his mother in her old blue hat wandering slowly by the brick house. A wave of desolation submerged him, and a shame that he seemed to be leaving her there, just as he had somehow agreed to leave Marika alone by Koban crossroads.

If he could just see Marika now and tell her how he felt—see that wistful smile crinkling into consoling fun and little jokes—ah, Marika! Maybe she could help him in this funny ache that was creeping all over him.

He glanced at his watch; it was not yet eleven—they often stayed up at Koban. . . . The thought came with a rush, and once inside the telephone booth he trembled with eagerness: "Vartek Varika—Koban Lake, Indiana;—Stan Plazarski, 3791, Jefferson." . . . A long wait, during which his thoughts followed hotly the bridging connection—down below the great lake to Durand—then to the cross-roads. . . . The bell jangled: "Mr. Plazarski?—your party—come ahead!"

202 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

He called for Marika, and soon from some interminable distance, faintly cool and far away, came a voice:

"Is—is it Stash?"

"Oh, Rika, I hav'n't written to you, but I'm coming down. That's the kind of fellow I am, that I try to make up."

"We're moving—onto the farm. To-morrow's the last night here maybe—but you'd come just the same!"

"Sure! I can't tell you how it seems to hear you."

"Just the same is the matter of me!—Krakanosh?—"

"Oh, I'd only like to hear you say that again. . . . Then—Rika—goodbye, until I get there, an'—good-bye!"

In the stillness of the booth he waited . . . as if he could somehow linger in the citron-smelling dusk of the lobby where he had just been talking with Rika. . . . The glare and music outside seemed unreal, unfriendly and far away.

V

Diblee took him to Chittenden Square for the night. The Viking fellow had the prospect of a week's painting in the marsh country before him, and promised to join Stash at the Wabash depot next noon.

It was after mid-day when Stash finished his business with McCandlish, and meeting Diblee, slid out of the train shed into the hazy brightness. It recalled the morning when he had seen his mother's white face diminish and the blue and pink hat grow dim. He squared away from Diblee suddenly and looked out grimly at the plodding fateful grandeur of the shipping.

CHAPTER III

I

The marsh country was creeping under a haze of Autumn night when Stash reached the *hostinets*. He found himself drawn in a din of happy voices to the broad lavitza, round which the chairs and tables for tomorrow's moving were stacked in gipsy abandon. Everyone seemed talking to him at once—of the new farm—of the Sokol's play for the new hall fund. . . .

"What part do you play, Karsh?" Stash questioned.

"*Zdenko!*" the wild-witted blacksmith answered. Varika shouted with laughter: for *Zdenko* appeared in the Sokol play as the head of the dead man only.

"I'm *Dalibor*," said Varsh, calling Stash's attention.

"Yes, and the weakest part in the whole thing," said Jennika, "unless you practise better."

"Not to tell you a lie, boy"—Karshenko slouched against a table—"I am the jailor, *Benesh*—so don't believe that other saying of mine that I was just a bloody head."

"My head would have to be lighter than yours to believe that; wouldn't it—Anetka?" Stash patted her hand as she snuggled beside him.

"Come over wid dat fiddle, you Ban!" Varika shouted into the dusk. The big swinging figure of the Carniolan roamed out of his retirement. Behind him, flashing like bronze in the *hostinets* light, came his stripling buddy, Stevo Kucin.

"I got to get something!"—Varika started for the lobby. Marika caught his arm: "Promise, tatski, you

won't call up Shabbatas and Marzaks and all—for why not have Stash without all that crowd!"

"Oh, now!" pled the little man, "how you know——!"

"I saw in your sneaky run!"

"Nonsense stuff!"

But Marika had her way, and cried: "Come, Ban!—and play for us like you saw it in that Buda café—where the Czigane played right on the dancers' heels!"

She swung to Stash, holding out her arms with a little laugh of whimsical tremolo. In a moment Ban was playing at their heels, following in lazy grace as if he skated in their train; quickening, driving the mazurka faster!—until it seemed as though he swept them—on down the empty lobby—around the old familiar and strangely vacant rooms. . . . They floated through those scenes of vanished happy times . . . like shadows of their old time selves. . . . A little cry—a laugh—from Marika broke the spell, and they drifted out into the dusk and din of voices under the whispering alders.

It was like the old capricious nights of the dark lake shore once again. . . . And yet to Stash it seemed a little strange and sad, carrying echoes such as rang in the now empty hall and rooms of the old crossroads *hostinets*.

II

Early the next morning Stash left the *Richelieu House* with Diblee. They caught a ride on the work train of the new Valley Electric shore line, which carried them almost to Varika's door, where yellow balast was sifting into the drowsy slapping lake.

Among the alders a gaudy red quilt made a bar-

baric tent shape, and the Ban in a crimson tunic was helping Marika roll the bedding for the last load. She flew out to the road with a sparkle in her dark eyes to whisper: "You see Ban's costume for *Dalibor*—he just had to try it on—the big foolish boy!"

Varika hurried out to greet them, and Stash said: "You don't look quite right without your old beard, Varik—I sort of miss it."

"Ho—Ho!" chuckled the little man, "so you like my beard? Was she a good one, heh? Well, we gotto change all dese old ways. My girls say: 'Ugh! Poppa, you look so ol' fashion.' Once you trim your beard though——" he tapped Diblee's arm warningly, "you have to build a new house next, or make yourself a foot taller, or some other trifle! Me—I had to give up de hostinets an' buy a farm."

Diblee laughed and stretched luxuriously: "They play the deuce, don't they?" His eyes were roving into the shady depths where Jennika lingered behind the gaudy tent like a provocative Czigane princess. Stash ran laughingly to bring her forward, and returning, with one slim quivering hand in his, heard Varika's cordial declaration:

"Well, an artist is all right, too. Like dat art gallery in Chicago—ver' fine. A dandy time we had dere once—till noon—an' we open our eggs an' chicken an' Tokaiski. . . . Well, ho!—up comes one dose fellows, tellin' us—you gotto lunch outside! But first I leave him a little pepper for *his* eggs! For den I was a quick man." He laughed uneasily.

"We ought to been ashamed of ourselves," Jennika burst out, the white creaming round burning pink islands in her cheeks.

"An' you cried wid de rest—not to be able to eat your egg!" Varika chuckled anxiously.

"I wasn't crying for that!" Jennika murmured in a gritting tone, her liquid falcon eyes slipping here and there in hot chagrin, "but 'cause I was so 'shamed."

"Well—well!" The little Czech shrugged nervously. The truth was that he was all in a fever of eagerness and recurring sadness and regret over leaving his cosy crossroads place where he had known so many happy years.

As Jennika turned away, her breast beating visibly with a storm of injured pride, Diblee launched after her with one of those swift lunges of power that graced his lazy magnificence. He stooped his great head above her, laughing gruffly: "Why, he did exactly right; don't you know it, Miss Varka!" Smiling with lazy confidence he led her across the road to the *hostinets* boat-landing.

III

Stash walked down the brook with an arm about Marika and her father to get some apples from the old trees.

"You know—Marika!" said the little man, bruising two apples together excitedly, "dat you have dat promise back—dat you wouldn't go away if I would move to de farm! . . . I like de farm all right now—wid some high black horses an' Ban to play! I say, you have de promise back!"

"No, tasich, I don't want to go away like I did."

"Why, only yesterday when I tell you—you brighten like a picture! . . . I could see you take a look off at dat music school—pretty fine to you! . . . For var you change! Well, maybe then 'cause Stash is here!"

Marika flashed Stash one dear smile of her goldeny black eyes, glowing round a darkening sombre center. "Stash won't stay here—so it wouldn't be that."

"How do you know I wouldn't?" Stash demanded.

"I guessed that . . . times before."

There was a subtly barbaric touch about her cheekbone that tangled with the touching curve below to leave a bitter feeling—or even, if you had hurt her—an anguished resentment hard to brush away.

Stash felt this now, as she turned from him to grasp her father's foolish pounding fists:

"Maybe I did till this morning!" her voice turned husky; "but I think I would stay because Jennika isn't happy much alone—and you see when I'm around, well . . ."

She laughed a little at having explained so poorly, and they walked on towards the pavilion and the big alders where *vilet* trophies had hung . . . Tokaishi grapes as red as blood that had dangled against the wild young Varsh's breast.

They found the pavilion deck a little breezy, and in the air a faint dinning of summer's end. Far through the alders they caught a glimpse of the lake like mica-flecked blue smoke. . . . And so they lingered about. . . .

"Do you remember, Varik," Stash laughed, "how you used to trot after us, unwinding your long pipe stem, and beggin' us to slow up for a taste of that!—like our legs were just hankerin' for it. . . ." He sighed. "I've had such good times here, and . . . and I didn't know it! . . ."

"Well—" Varika muttered sympathetically, "you're right, Stash-boy—but I had such times and—and I was knowing it. . . ."

Alone and striding along the new roadbed, Stash felt the ache in his heart swell to angry longing; longing to go back to the old hostinets nights and times. Not because they were ideal, but because he had a feeling that there was some beauty in them that he hadn't tried hard enough to realize!—some beauty that he could not bear to lose. He turned to look back at the rambling old building, and caught himself muttering—as when a small boy crossing the Great Lake—"Good-bye . . . old place . . . old times, too, I guess. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

I

Stash had been accusing himself of neglecting the Fentrees when—meeting Fentree one morning—he found the lawyer begging him to resume his old room in the lavender house. His decision was determined by Fentree's remark about Mrs. Fentree and Louise. They were unprotected when Fentree was away from home—with a rough foreign rooming place in the big brick house next door. The old neighborhood was changing sadly.

Stash found a queer pleasure in going back to the room on the alley—"Stash's room." There was an odd little thrill in passing Old Whaleback's Castle each day, with always the chance of a fleeting glimpse of Rose Maddon. For she was home again, and like a little goddess out of the machine had touched the powerful spring that won attention and final acceptance for his scenario masque. So he proudly thought.

Her father was on the committee that had picked his "Aladdin in Adland."

One morning he ran eagerly up the winding drive to answer a gleam of waving hand from the portecochère steps. He found her pulling on her gloves; and a wan milky lamp above her head seemed to deny it was broad morning and claimed the castle terrace and the girl on the steps for Fairyland . . . and for Stash. Such a Prince as he sprang up to take her hand:

"How'd you like to go through a hoodooed show-house—all dark and full of spooks?"

"The old *Alhambra*? . . . Just great! Weren't you afraid renting it—they say it's hoodooed for good. Who else is there?"

"Carpenters agreed to be there. That's all. We may scare out the ghost of the theatre cat. With his eyes of green and his goblin scream—though he spits ghost-fire he's still a live wire . . . Excuse me—song rhymes. I've got 'em on the brain, Rose. For everything I have to find a rhyme!"

"It's pitiful," she mourned, "poor Stash!" They swept out through the sandstone gate and up over Wacaser crest. It was exhilarating to ride with Rose; she seemed to forget her hands lying carelessly on the wheel, and at the most casual angles swerved off from disaster.

II

Stepping from the mellow morning sunshine into the dark theatre was like entering a gray cavern where a ghostly sunlight seethed in by stealth and the burden of street traffic rumbled vaguely as a train tunneling under the house and dwindling fast away.

"Doesn't your voice echo?" said Rose. "Once when I was little I got into church—too early for the Christmas practice—and it was terribly still like this—exciting!"

"Guess we better go back and find those workmen."

"Oh, no—I haven't seen the cat yet! It isn't half spooky."

They moved down through the box gangway to back-stage.

Something suddenly fell with a clattering boom.

"What's that?" Rose's eyes dilated in the darkness. Stash had sprung close and bent above her, looking up . . . but saw nothing. . . . The drowsy quiet resumed.

"Some prop falling," Stash grumbled, grinning at his own alarm. Yet a feeling of uneasiness persisted even as he talked laughingly: "See the funny old grand drapery. . . . Do you like to read old grapevine on the entrance walls? . . ."

Rose stooped to decipher the catch-words, reeking like old musk of erotic buffoonery. . . . "'Gone back to the runs, dearie. . . . You beautiful door-grinder in our alley.'"

"Such cunning names!" Rose laughed. "Fay Fayol—Cissie Bernice—Undine Murdock. . . ."

Stash responded from up-stage. . . . "We could play to capacity here all right—of rats! Whiskered guys like heavy uncles in the front row. . . ."

Rose had just time to think how cool his laughing voice sounded when a frightful crash echoed through the cavern. . . . With heart thundering she flew around the wing. Where Stash had stood there lay a metal channel with border lights which had flung shat-

tered glass to his feet. His face was knotted with red anger, and following his eyes she saw shadowy figures in the fly gallery and heard a husky laugh.

"You're all right!" she exclaimed in excited relief.

"Yes," Stash spoke abruptly, "but I'm going to get you out. They'd drop one on you just as soon . . . See here, you fellows! . . ." His lip flicked back with a snarl of roaring fury: "If I catch the one that did that, I'll smash him cold. . . . And you tell Sartos and old man Jastrow that I know who steered it!"

There was a burst of laughter, and the cavern echoed fast with clanging tongues . . . while a young carpenter's helper put his head out to shout gruffly: "Come on, now—she just happen!—I had Bartek and Louie in to help. . . . And we was just pushin' up to see what you . . ." He finished in a clash of rolling-mill Magyar. . . .

. . . And even Rose—hanging to Stash's hand as she ran through the gangway—understood vaguely the outrageous implication of the roaring talk. In the street she turned angrily: "Go back, and pretend it *was* an accident!"

"It's the same old game," said Stash. "I'll go down to old man Jastrow's to-night—and tell them I'll get Varsh and run Sartos' gang out of town!" His eyes were slits of black fire.

The angry moisture had washed Rose's eyes to a flashing blue: "They could have killed you!" Out here in the bright noisy street it seemed incredible.

Stash gave a snort of laughter: "They take their chance on that. . . . I'm going back now, Rose. . . . Anyway we stirred up the ghosts!" He smiled with all his natural eagerness and joy.

212 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

She flashed back a proud smile: "Go and show them. And if they don't stop, I'll—I'll ask father"—she hesitated for the word—"to squelch them all!"

Stash waved good-bye: "He can do that after Varsh and I have had our go!"

III

He chose the opposite alley . . . and tip-toeing across the stage . . . crashed into the unsuspecting group in the gangway . . . caught the Magyar helper by the shoulder and hurled him spinning into the alley. A stiff-armed strut towards the others sent them—mocking and jeering—out into the dusky alley.

He took a last look into the arching gloom of the house. Two passing picture managements had failed there. There seemed a menace in the murmuring old vault. The vicious attack on him could only mean that Sartos had taken up the old venomous fight just where it had dropped off. . . . And if old Jastrow, with his hate of the Plazarskis, was behind Sartos, then a harassing and abusive struggle was just opening. . . . Where would it end? . . . And the worst was that he had drawn Rose Maddon into the savage beginning of it! *Thunder!*—what would her father think of such reckless, careless business! . . . He stood scowling. . . . And yet—as he banged the green Moorish door—he felt a sudden thrill that the dubious, gilded old cavern was *his house!*—and that he was embarked on a new enterprise of danger . . . glory . . . love! . . . Who knew what!

CHAPTER V

I

Stash caught a ride to the Koban blacksmith shop, and calling Varsh aside told him of the morning's affair.

"God damn it!" said Varsh, "I would help you, boy; but only I wish you would get that tall guy away. . . . I know he come with you—but that I don' hold against you!—If you would only—Stash-a-boy—He's spoilin' things—an' boy! . . ." The big brown hands were trembling—the old merry but quickly mournful eyes were moist with eagerness for Stash's help.

"I can't do anything about that unless he hurts some of my friends, can I? . . . How is he spoiling things? . . . You mean about? . . ." He saw he needn't form Jennika's name,—for Varsh nodded helplessly.

"Oh, well!—" Stash tossed his head in brusque counsel—"I wouldn't worry! He just plays around, and never stays long." His words struck him as insincere.

Varsh's head turned toward the lake. Stash had taken a tone that waived his anxiety. He was baffled . . . and yet he said the simple truth. . . . He did not blame Stash . . . couldn't, wouldn't! . . . not Stash-a-boy! He looked back with a sort of limp grin.

Walking back along the road with Stash, he grew feverishly excited over the prospect of a new running fight like the old days before young Stash had left for the north and many cities. But abruptly he stopped and said: "I go no farther, boy."

After Stash had started on he looked back once and

caught Varsh turned, with a queer grin on his face—a kind of tearful smile wrung dry.

At the landing beyond the hotel he found Diblee and Jennika pushing out. The bitter-sweet smiling face under smoldering dark hair was lit by flashes from the burning blue lake. She called to him that Marika was in town—at Father Jan's—, and Stash swung on, scowling and knotting his hands in anger over this new perplexity.

II

Now—as often—his impulse was to seek Marika and talk over everything with her. He put it off, however, until evening, when he found the Wacaser Street maples rushing ominously in the windy darkness above his head, as if they traveled fast or carried trains of storming rumor. One pale gas-light in Father Dubrowski's hall lit the worn brick steps for Stash, and Marika led him into a large dusk room where a cannel-coal fire flickered in volatile gaseous brightness and huge oil paintings sank gleaming into the walls.

"Jennika said I could catch you here," Stash apologized in a gruff murmur.

"Yes—till choir practise, and that's a whole half hour yet."

He sat down uneasily, ashamed before her eager smile to begin the story of his worries. Nonetheless he found himself telling of the morning's crash in the theatre, and—somehow—omitting Rose Maddon's name. He sprang up, distraught and hesitating: "I think—if I could talk to Fentree about it . . ."

"I wish you could!" Marika frowned anxiously.

"I went up—and saw Tom Shieling."

"What did Tom say?"

"Not to bother Fen. That he's almost ruined in this Imbrie coal business . . . and can't see anything straight. . . ."

"I can't see how that is—when he's buying land around Koban for his company—with lots of money to pay."

"That's Maddon-Marantle's company. They're pulling him out with this new . . . I don't understand it! But Shieling thinks that's the worst thing yet! . . . He says there's no use my going to see old Jastrow either."

"You going to see Jastrow!" Marika looked up in alarm.

"Yes, going down there to-night—give them notice. But Tom says Maddon owns Jastrow—that old Jastrow'll stop all this business the minute Maddon presses a buzzer—and that he'll knuckle it hard, Maddon will, now that he knows . . . since he knows . . . what happened this morning. . . . All fool talk. I told him so. But he's crazy about Fen—says he's going down by the stern. It's all—all—his——"

"But, Stash!—you won't go to Jastrow's—and start all that terrible business again! . . ."

Stash stared frowningly above her head, his gaze held by a queer movement in the wall. "Look!" he said. "They come out—and go back!"

Marika turned to look at the tall funereal hats of a group of Polish soldiery stopping at a wintry hut.

"It's their hats mostly," said Stash.

"Their czapkas," said Marika, "sometimes they seem to be like ships—and that red sunset an ocean—and those ships are just floating towards me . . . it's the coal fire lighting the picture."

As she spoke the eccentric blaze flared up, and those

hats like black prowed death-ships seemed to surge out on a crimson sea of sunset. Gloomy, stormy faces rode beneath. It was a strange, a somehow daunting picture. Stash tore his gaze away from it, and as if to assert his power of resolution declared shortly: "I'm going now, to Jastrow's, Rika."

To her it seemed as if his face had assumed for an instant something of the storminess of those high boned faces beneath the death-ships. He had caught something from them that belonged to him!—something that daunted her—and froze the plea on her lips.

He turned on his heel—paused—and turning back spoke suddenly and resolutely: "Rose Maddon was with me this morning—when that border fell. She brought me downtown in her car. I took her in to see the old place. I ought to have located the carpenters first. That's what makes it worse. I don't know why I didn't tell you at first. Ashamed of it all, I guess. So—anyway—I'll say good-bye, Rik!"

He gave her hand a short hard clasp, and was gone—into the night—where the dark trees whistled—telling of storm on the Lakes.

III

The orchestrion at Jastrow's was trundling out its thunderous music when Stash pushed through the swing door. Old Jastrow lifted his granite, coaly-seamed face from his newspaper. Watery glands forced him to wipe his eyes, which were cold as basement stones where water always trickles. He grunted at Stash.

It was this grumbling underground menace of the

old man that made Stash lean across the bar and bark in a booming voice: "*Where's Sartos?*"

The men shaking for drinks stopped their play to watch.

"In the back," said Jastrow mechanically.

Stash wheeled through where the orchestration loomed; its colored glass mantle of blue Caucasus mountain peaks and pink waterfalls reared majestic in the dinginess. The music gushed on: a surge of purple thunder and wheedling carmine tinklings. A billiard table extending from it with the bulbous legs of juggernaut affected a continuous machine, and around it Sartos' gang lounged like riders. It was a nasty night outside.

"Hello, Sartos!" said Stash in ironic greeting.

The little man raised his crumbled-in face and muttered submissively: "Hello, Plaz."

"I went out to see my brother this morning," said Stash, "and we'll match you for fun. It'll be 'in the clear' and good-bye to Durand for the bunch that loses."

"Oh, no!" said Sartos, grinning aside in oblique anxiety, "that was a mistake this morning. Drumgoole gets it mixed. He thinks we still got a *comitadje* on you!"

The man Drumgoole, with his greenish discolored face flattened out to mucous shiny red lips on which a cigarette hung, nodded good-naturedly.

Stash eyed this turtle-face sharply: "That's good! . . . But I happen to know you hadn't a thing to do with it, Drumgoole."

"Maybe not!" Sartos scowled. "I say a mistake, don't I?—Ain't that enough!"

A mistake. . . . Tom Shieling had said the same.

Rose Maddon's being involved made it a hideous slip of the established machinery. He saw the grin spreading from the reptilian turtle-face to others.

"All right," he said, grinning back at the comical depravity of Drumgoole's face, "it always will be a mistake. . . . *Remember that.*" Standing back a step, he challenged them with eyes narrowed to slits of black. . . . He saw the grins twisting and drying on their faces; and again grimly smiling to cover his own baffled feeling he swung through the mirrored side-doors, which reflected the barbaric discord of the room, into the windy night.

As he flung the door behind him Stash felt that he had been defrauded of a clear-out defiance. The menace was held on too slippery a noose. He longed to turn to Fentree. But what if Tom Shieling was as right about Fen as he had been about Maddon-Marantle and Jastrow? There was a muffled fury of business excitement about Fentree like the quivering haze around machines. He would smile at you intently, and miss your query. Stash admitted with a sinking of heart that Fentree was different.

CHAPTER VI

I

After his interview at Jastrow's Stash had a piano installed in the old *Alhambra* pit, and moved in. While the carpenters raised a resounding tumult he worked on a group of songs to carry the color of his Oriental setting.

It was great fun, especially on rainy Autumn morn-

ings, to whistle and sing and finger out musical themes, all undisturbed by the booming of hammers and the long swish of rain on the roof. Wrapped in the aureole of his cowl-light he seemed to roll on in a crystal of his own conjuring, within a larger rolling orb of the booming building, through a morning of storm. To his heated brain it was like some great ship of majestic din.

Then came bad half hours when he discovered some cadenza to be mere frothy extravagance, and the musical rhythm yawed off from the lyric's rhythm; when at last he must spring up and swagger whistling around the pit to drive off his depression and shame-faced desperation.

Always this swaggering challenge brought its reward of desperate elation, with a half mad yearning for some defiant glory just dawning through the darkness. . . . He would turn furiously to the piano and storm off rousing gallantries from "The Purple Highway" or "Such a Paprika Princess"—or plaintive little Polish songs like "O Gwiadeczek!" that he had learned he hardly knew when. Visions poured through his burning head: of Rose against a black glossy river at the *Shabby Lantern*—of Marika smiling through a snowy gust of spotlight or crying with caught-up trembling lip alone on Koban Lake—of mournful czapka helmets swelling through a crimson sunset with some splendid dread fate for him. . . . Suddenly he would turn to his work and find the bravura trick to slur his phrase into step.

And so the thing grew: grew while he played—furiously or in seeming idleness—with Bob Dalhousie, with Max Dunrin—with Rose.

II

There was a prospect of help from Andre too. For Andre had come home to assist in the Fentrees' new establishment. The Park House with its slate-blue roof and yard of forest density had been rented by a prospering Fentree, and the old undesirable neighborhood left behind. Unable to sell the smoky lavender house, Fentree had made it the office of his *Koban Industrial Company*.

To Stash the Park place seemed haunted by romantic memories. And as he guided elephantine vans under threshing maple branches on that blustery fall morning of moving, he thought the storm-blue roof looked forbidding—as though it had some secret tenant to guard: A little princess girl had lived here once: the darkness of the upper halls seemed still to know her.

He clattered down the dusky stairs to the veranda, where Bob Dalhousie was helping the vanman with a bulky buffet, and saw across the lawn a horseback figure in Hungarian plum-red habit and tricorne hat coming between the trees. His heart leapt, and calling into the resounding hall—"Rose Maddon!"—he waited for her greeting. It came so casually and off-hand, as she sprang forward to kiss Andre, that he fell into a sudden black depression.

A little later, when Mrs. Fentree and the girls followed Bob down the vine-strewn walk, Stash caught the chance to speak to Rose: "I've been thinking," he murmured in a low voice, "about a little girl in Christmas church alone, and how her eyes looked! . . . Such a blue!"

Rose laughed, flashing him a starry smile in the hall gloom.

"I won't stay here if I've got to put up with that little ghost around!" Stash laughed gruffly, his face suddenly clenching as if to keep back some storm of feeling. His own eyes now shone, as though with angry tears. . . . Startled—she put out her hand as though to quiet him, and speaking vaguely, hurriedly—"And while I was a little girl here—you were——"

"In ol' Koban Hotel!——" he laughed brusquely.

"That queer old place in the dark trees!" There was a little repellant quiver in her voice, shot with tenderness.

Stash frowned, turning his dark gaze inward, yet seeing her still in dusky brilliance, with the slant of a sunshaft brightening on her hair, with her plum-colored habit folding purplish shadows. To him there seemed a strange sadness in the shaking of the bright wind outside. He saw Bob leaning through the wind to the car crossing and Fentree getting off. And neither said a word: facing past each other, yet seeing each other in a timeless clearness that held a mournful sweet antagonism.

Fentree came in with the others. His thin sallow face with silver-sharp mustache turned in delighted surprise to Rose:

"I didn't know we got Rose with the house! . . . Bargain day, Stash!"

"Sad luck I don't go with it! Just my ghost. Like the faded piano spot on the wall paper."

"I've got one of those spots over at the old house," said Fentree, "we didn't think fit to move it. Too old fashioned for Louise."

Rose smiled over at Louise: "I'll always like this

better than ours. I envy you the grounds, going back to the creek."

"A castle on a high hill cannot be hid," Fentree muttered an encouraging paraphrase; "but you'll have to come here often!"

"Yes!—and it'll be *you* that'll have to stand on the fence and coohoo to *me* now!"

"Oh, dear, yes!" Fentree's eyes glowed reminiscent. "As if I'd ever forget that wistful little lady calling—'Hello, Mr. Fen!' How pretty you were then, Rose. You'll never come up to it again!"

Rose waved him a mocking "thank you" and moved out onto the veranda.

III

Stash led her horse through the Stewart-iron gate and paused before helping her on.

She lifted a serious face: "Stash—I've asked Marika for to-morrow night—to my rout for Andre. . . . I can't ask your friend—that *Lady Island* man—he's going to leave Marika's sister awfully hurt. And your little Rika will feel sad—and that gay little old father, too. . . . Had you thought about it, Stash?"

He confessed that he had. Her words stirred a tissue of poignant doubt and distress in his mind. And penetrating this was a new feeling about Rose—a feeling of her tender understanding beneath a gay surface—a feeling too of her unattainable beauty. He tried to explain how he had got involved with Diblee. He admitted that he was confused, and he did not call down his old solution of *not being able to bother about all that*.

Her small fist clutching the bridle taunted and stung him with its endearing minuteness. Her position so

far above young Stan Plazarski he had always carelessly accepted, merely smiling to think how he had coaxed such a fortune's darling to play along with him. Now for the first time the thought of losing her dried his throat and threw his hopes and plans into turmoil. If he could only say: "Rose Madder in a Shining Spot—come on away north with me!" But of power such as money gives he had little enough; and every mile away from Durand and Koban would drag heavier the chains that bound him to Marika and Varsh and their troubles, and now—it seemed—Jennika's.

He scuffed off a lichen at the base of a tree: "I think Andre may go with me to-night to see the Sokol play at Koban—in the old hotel. I wondered—I thought you wouldn't care to go to that old hotel where they're giving it. . . . It's so black looking and it's a no good setting for you. . . ."

"Why . . . Stash!" She looked up into his dark frowning eyes.

"You said yourself it was a queer old place," he laughed abruptly, "queer old place!" It was as if he begged her angrily to show that she did not credit the dubious and shadowy history that clouded about him and his queer people. His head was bowed in shame and fear that those people, his friends, were not in Rose's world at all. He was angry for Marika's sake that Rose should have to stoop to her—and angry with himself for his shame and fear.

Rose studied the big bent head with a queer repugnant frown. She resented his angry shame that thrust its burden harshly on her—resented her own sense of pity for the big strange fellow—a pity embarrassing and distressing . . . like the queer tenderness that stormed up in her at sight of his shining bent head.

"Stash——" she murmured, "are you going to help me on?"

He held out a big trembling hand for her foot. . . . She saw as she looked down from her saddle that his eyes were narrowed to black fanatic slits and smiled with a show of her old surface lightness: "Go with Andre to-night, and forget all about me for a while, please."

He heard the legato—staccato of her animal's hoofs sounding down the windy street, and called hard on the resource of the Glorious Defiance, whose secret he had learned in the musty *Alhambra* pit on mornings of Autumn storm.

CHAPTER VII

I

It was that evening that Rose got Marika's message of regret. She allowed it to worry her till after dinner, and suddenly decided to drive out alone and see Marika in person.

The sun had fallen low in a ruddy haze when she passed Koban Lake. The old hotel was already ablaze and vaguely busy, and even the *hostinets* where Rose stopped showed laughing groups that had come in for the big night. It gave her a queer feeling when she found that the Varikas had left the crossroads store, and the friendly direction of a jolly dark fellow who came forward from the lavitza hardly lessened her inimical out-of-place feeling. Passing a dim tamarack cove of the darkening lake she abruptly decided to turn back, and once turned she could hardly go fast enough.

She had scarcely passed the gloomy osage hedge that ran with the hotel property when a strange figure tore out through the dusk waving fiercely. For just an instant it looked like Stash—and then she saw that it was Varsh in his “Dalibor” costume. Her hands were trembling as she stopped.

“Oh, lady!” he muttered, “they won’t see! . . . You know I saw you goin’ up . . . so I watched. . . . Oh, but girl! you like dat Stash-a-boy! . . . Well, see! you know he likes you, heh?—Good God, girl! I guess he does a lot—for why could he help it! . . . See, if you would ask him to take dat fellow away—he would do it, see, he would do it!——” Smiling distressingly he rushed on: “Because such a fellow is spoilin’ things here . . . takin’ dat Jennika away from me an’ everybody . . . for why?——” He begged her abruptly with all the passion of his mournful once merry eyes to tell him why.

“Den if he would once go she would get over such a strange way. . . . *Such a strange way*——” he panted whisperingly. And in this whisper of despairing wonder was the picture of a mocking lost Jennika, drifting away fast—fast!

“Her father an’ matter——” he clutched the seat and brought his rumpled brown head closer, “dey think maybe he would marry her. . . .” Rose’s heart was hammering fiercely. . . . “But I say no—oh, no——” His eyes were shining now with uncontrollable tears, but he made a desperate effort with his lips . . . and smiled. . . . Timidly grasping one of her hands he hoarsed: “Den if you would ask him . . . he would do it, dat Stash—he would find de way, dat boy! . . . If you would den just ask him! . . . *Say, littlest pretty girl . . . you please!*”

His tears were gone; he was smiling a despairing smile wrenched dry. There was such a smarting mist in Rose's eyes that it was hard to see through the dusk. But figures were approaching, and she drew her hand away.

"I'll try . . ." she murmured . . . and was soon speeding on, past Karshenko's corner, past the Valley Electric bunk-houses, and alongside the dull cool gleaming of Koban Lake.

II

All next day—the day of her rout—Rose seemed to be brushing away the shadow of a bad dream. . . . And now that night had come and she assured herself as she walked through the gala lighted, empty rooms that she need not keep her promise to Varsh, she felt that the shadow of the dream had come around Stash, clouding the debonair grace of the black eyed bronze-haired boy who had always seemed to carry a flashing gay sword in play . . . but never in tumultuous dark earnest. . . . Until—until lately—until yesterday morning.

She had always been too loyal to her darling whims to be snobbish. What was there in Durand to be snobbish over? But independent as she felt of it all—there was some question where even this bizarre world could contain the crossroads tragedies of Jennika Varika and Varsh Plazarski. Already she wondered if Stash would appear the same to her!

She crossed the freshly polished dancing floor and turned down the west hall past the billiard room and her father's den to the pilot-house conservatory which looked out across the purple lake of night; and bending to see that the dirt from a water-swollen orange

tub had been cleaned away so that the white and tuscan tessalatus didn't grit under foot, she returned by the same way and passing a French door caught a full-length reflection of herself against the blue-black night. Her black satin gown melted into mystic dark—where floated a glossy version of the cornflower blue bodice edging the square décolleté. She smiled—as at some refreshing personage outside—and with a thrill of rising verve tossed a curt bow . . . when suddenly something whispered hoarsely—“*Oh, littlest pretty girl!*” . . . and the murmur of all that affair which she had momentarily forgotten reverberated in return. . . . She stood trembling—staring at herself as if angrily non-plussed. She clenched her hands in repudiation of that affair—and of Stash—and a little in horror and pity.

III

Fully her gay marquise self when Hugh Marantle and Louise came, she showed them the new conservatory with its pilot-house circle of great windows and helped eagerly in locating the far off floating lights.

“A Valley Electric——” Marantle pointed out a moving yellow crayon.

“And isn't that bunch of lights off there the Bowling Green mines?” Louise inquired eagerly.

Rose's surprised glance met Hugh's. . . . Evidently Louise didn't yet know that Bowling Green stood for financial disaster and humiliation to all except Imbrie, who had pulled safely out,—or that Fentree had been saved by Maddon-Marantle.

The belling of horns under the porte-cochère called Rose down the hall, where she halted in her flight to

catch her father's curtly muttered command: "Send young Plazarski in to me when he comes."

She nodded, and with a slightly hurried heart-beat moved on.

It happened that Stash and Andre arrived with a large group; and having held back resolutely while Rose greeted the others, Stash abruptly caught her hand and walked her down the side of the hall, talking low but tumultuously.

"Did you get my roses?" he asked eagerly. "Tell me what sort of hat you wore yesterday morning! . . ."

Rose started to speak and caught her breath.

"Mind double questions like that? It's your own invention, Rose. You used to dazzle me that way. But 'our Mr. Plazarski' the pain-killer 'plugged in' and learned double entry."

"Father wants to see you a minute. . . ." She was angry with the tremor in her voice. His abruptness had not only carried her by storm; but somehow the flushed knotted forehead and brusque black eyes, the vibration of his voice and the great boyish hand thrilled her, just as if there were some unique audacity in drawing one off down the side of a hall.

"I'm not going to waste time on him now," said Stash, "not till you tell me what that hat——"

"A tricorne," she returned crisply.

"That's the name for your best looks and smiles! I thought it would be a pretty name! And where is he now?"

"Second on the left down there—just knock."

IV

He sped down the hall and knocked at the door. The moment he entered the room he felt that he was on the stand. Tall Clem Marantle, whose easy slouch in a big leather chair made him look more than ever a South American man of mark, let a quizzical, ironical smile drift over him.

Maddon's eyes glinted out at him through bushy brows: "That's right—sit down! We'll get to the point straight away. It's this idea of scoring funny hits on well-known men in town . . . you could easily push that too far in your ad spectacle. Can't tell where you might be getting in a damaging wedge. If you did—the papers would thank you for it and hammer it in. Especially the *Tribune*. You know Marion, don't you? . . . I thought so! The point is—that you've been planning this with your tongues in your cheeks—you and Marion and Tom Shieling!"

Stash sprang up: "Shieling had nothing to do with it!"

"Oh . . . arranged between you and Marion! That's what I was trying to get at."

Now that Stash was on his feet he wanted to break away, but he felt himself caught. He opened his lips—closed them—stepped back as if for clearer action. Marantle's dry dark eyes seemed to be twinkling all over him ironically. Both men looked so grossly indolent sprawled below him. Suspicions seethed through his head. They were trying to get something on Marion . . . through him. . . . Suddenly there sprang alight a revealing flare of intuition! He had dared too far on his acquaintance with Rose Maddon—and her

father had determined to break it off abruptly!—and incidentally to deal a rebuff to Marion. He cleared his throat hoarsely:

“What’s the use of all this! You know I couldn’t do you any damage! You’re getting at something else—underhand! Well, I’ll see the play through! Every tag! The theatre lease is in my name! I’ll go on! I’ll put on something else! I’ll tell you what I’ll do—I’ll hand over the script, and you can run it without the little things that hurt your feelings! But if I go on with it—it goes just as it is!” He felt an exultant defiance in carrying the war into the enemy’s chosen country.

“I think Cardroy was satisfied with your layout—as you showed it to him,” Maddon spoke in disconcerting commonplace, as if nothing had happened; “it doesn’t seem fair to you to take it over. . . . But you’ve stated your own terms, and I always like to meet a man on his own ground.” With equally disconcerting swiftness he sprang to his feet, and looking at his watch said: “*I’ll give you just an hour to decide whether you’ll stick to that. I’ll be here.*”

Again Stash carried the fight—and this time deeper—into the enemy’s country. Feeling himself towering above the shorter man, he said smilingly: “In an hour? . . . But in an hour I might be dancing . . . with *Rose*. . . . I’d never stop then for anything!”

Apparently he had struck fire. The square little man advanced suddenly: “If you’re not panhandling for someone bigger than you,” he threw out harshly, “you’re working hard for yourself! And you can tell your superior that we’ve short circuited his line of burlesque!”

“That’s funny!” Stash exclaimed. “That’s some-

thing like the word I sent *your fellows* at *Jastrow's* when they tried to play a dirty trick on me at the Alhambra!"

He knew well that Maddon knew—that Rose had been with him that morning—that the trick might have horribly involved her. The eyebrows had so lowered that Stash could hardly see the glint of the eyes. He made a long arm for the door—paused to look back grimly—and swung out.

V

His head was in an extravagant whirl of defiance and wild schemes. On his way to Rose the mad inspiration seized him to insure himself of a dance with her on the hour's end.

"It's mighty mysterious," he whispered, "and I'll tell you afterward why!—but I must be dancing with you on the hour!—the mystic hour, you know—*just must!* You know, you cheated me not to wear one o' my roses!"

"It would have looked too—too *premiere danseuse* with this gown, Stash. But wait—I may satisfy you!"

"You could have carried it around, sort o' torturing it in your hands."

"But wait!" Who knows?—I can be mysterious too!"

In the end she consented to give him the fourth and fifth if he could get Dunrin and Tragressor to yield them.

Stash attended to this matter while the first glissandos toppled from tuning violins; then wandered out onto the balustraded terrace. A warm wind was blowing, smooth and velvet dark—and like Rose Maddon's gown. Once he caught her profile passing the double

French doors—a daring gallant profile. Different from Marika's. You liked Marika best looking her full in the face—when one lip lifted oddly as if caught up at the corner, and the eye on that side crinkled more than the other. Why couldn't he understand Marika lately? He had fumed a little over her refusal to come to-night.

He lit a cigarette, inhaled a breath and threw it away. He wanted to be alone in order to think things out; but, strangely enough, he could do no thinking.

CHAPTER VIII

I

After a vague whirl with Stella Tragressor, Stash came to his dance with Rose, and the first thing he noticed was an odd glow of red that seemed to throb under the lace at her breast, indefinite against the blue lining. His voice shook: "I thought that colored edge was blue."

"It's cornflower," Rose laughed lightly.

"I didn't know cornflower was red!"

"Maybe you think Killarney roses are green."

The waltz ran on, fringed with a tangled bijouterie of wistful tinklings, like a gay marquee where gallant officers mount to cross the portico of dreamland.

"*'Laska a zivot v Vidni!'*" Stash murmured—"Love and Life in Vienna!——"

"*'L'Amour et La Vie'*. . . say it slashy and foreign again, Stash," she begged eagerly; "it sounds like a slashy caress!"

So Stash muttered again the Slavic words like a

“slashy caress”—and the waltz twinkled on to a rococo close.

Now as he led her towards the balustrade he glanced back through the French doors and saw Clem Marantle and John Maddon standing on the stair gallery. His throat tightened with the thumping pulse of triumph. How had he happened on the beautiful inspiration to time his dance with Rose to the challenge of his words!

He was sure now that Maddon had linked him with the revolting forces of the town and had determined to remove him from all approach to Rose. To-night perhaps would be the last.

“Are you going to be going back—over there—Rose?”

“But of course. See here though—you were going to tell me why we had to dance on the hour! Mysterious reasons to the front!”

“I can’t just now. I’m—so stirred up! I feel—with this warm wind and everything—that I’m full of excitement and wine in wicker bashticks! In a minute I’ll tell you. . . . You remember you weren’t coming back here till your father built a new house?”

“I haven’t chopped down the tower, either, have I? But I’ve learned that a house can be a perfect curio if only you don’t build it that way yourself. You soften it down a little—and there it is!—all the better for having a story with it!—” She stopped abruptly, for it had flashed back to mind that Stash was in that story—Stash and his queer people.

Others were drifting out into the enchanted warmth of the night, chattering and laughing. Rose spoke softly: “And you can’t tell me because you’re so stirred up?”

“I can tell, of course!—” he muttered. “I’ve

thrown over the masque. Your father's angry because, he says, I was mixed up with Marion and Shieling in a political burlesque. Of course I wasn't. But he put it in such a way that I couldn't deny without explaining—explaining—and feeling like a kicked topper at the end. And—all of a sudden I saw that that was what he wanted me to feel! I told him they could run the thing as they pleased. I'd keep the house and put on something else. He gave me an hour to think it over, he said, and told me to come back in that time. I told him I might be dancing with *you*—and it would never do to stop!" In spite of him a gruff laugh rose in his throat. "So you see why I've got a feeling of 'last night I was happy, Maxine; the music was divine!'—mixed up with—thunder!—with a feeling that it's maybe all over!—and that I'm ready"—his voice fell to a harsh whisper—"to do something crazy, to think it's all ended!"

Rose's heart was beating fast.

"If he's scheming to keep me away from you—feeling I'm not good enough for you—all right, I'll go on away! If it was just a political fight, I'd stay on and smash it through—Jastrow or no Jastrow!"

That name started a beating in Rose's frightened mind. She could see that her father had made a curt determination to brush young Plazarski out of his path—and *hers!* . . . Whether Stash had been guilty of any real offense to him made no difference. Her heart burned against the ruthless force that would be turned against Stash—burned the more so that she knew he *would* try to *smash it through*—and because—because she had been turning on him so lately her own angered and repellant suspicion! Trying to keep her voice fixed and even, she asked:

"How was *Dalibor* last night?"

"Oh, it would have made you smile," he answered, "but Karshenko was a wonder. He'd make a rioting old *Devilshoof*!"

"And Jennika?"

"She was all right—but Varsh played off a wild old opposition. If he'd learned his lines——"

Her voice vibrated queerly in her ears: "You must do something for him. He's in horrible misery! . . . or he wouldn't have come out to me last night—when I drove by."

"He *did*!"

"And begged me to ask you to get Diblee away. . . . A long time ago I promised to dare you—and I guess this is it, Stash! It's hard to do, but you can ask him . . . for her sake . . . and your brother's . . . and for Marika's."

Stash was thrilled with angry terror to think this business had been thrust in Rose's face. "I'll speak to him—I'll do something!" he muttered. "I promise! I'll do anything you say is right, except to run him out of town or hire a gang to lay him up at Jastrow's."

That name came again like a chill to Rose's hot heart: "That's—that's the old saloon where that horribly grand music goes on all the time? . . . Are they the ones that were trying to hurt you that morning at the Alhambra?"

"Sure," said Stash; "all the rough ones rendezvous at Jastrow's. I suppose they'll be after me now I've gone against the combine."

"The combine? . . ."

"Maddon-Marantle," Stash muttered, brusquely apologetic.

"Oh—I thought you meant a theatrical combine.

. . . You don't mean that *they would take away* your protection?"

"I don't want any protection," Stash laughed unsteadily. "I want to fight it through!"—his eyes shone in the semi-darkness—"that's a game that I can play—with Varsh and Shieling and Marion to help—I can make it a smashing go! He can't hurt me that way—your father—when I'm on my guard—but he can take you away!" he ended abruptly, harshly

"I promise you!" she spoke impulsively, "that I won't let him use me to punish you! I won't leave till I'm sure of that. I'll—I'll help you any way I can!"

"*Listen!*" Stash grasped her hand in an iron grip; he was mastered by a new and tremendous madness. "Will you do something—will you sing for me in the play I put on? . . . The Alhambra's still mine! I'll spend every cent I have, and get backing from Mac! But Rose—I'll never bother you by coming here. I would only see you in the crowd. But that would be enough!"

"I can't tell you now——" her breath coming fast—"I'll try to tell you later!"

They hurried in, but Stash had no partner for the dance and walked outdoors again, feeling freer in the soft flowing darkness.

II

In the thronging confusion of his mind one thing was clear: his desire to show Maddon-Marantle that in flinging the lash around him they had tangled themselves with a hard case! He would get some reckless men around him: for instance, the stripling Stevo Kucin, who had been a *comitadje* in old Serbia. . . . Well, there was no limit to his schemes!

He wondered with an aching sweet thrill if she had really tucked one of his roses into the bodice of that dainty gown; and this thrill merged into a horrible chagrin that Varsh's muddle had been pressed on her.

He made it a point of honor to stay away from her the rest of the evening, thinking he saw or felt a charming appreciation in her far off, shining manner. Each glimpse of her small dark-gowned figure drew a tingling hurt across his heart like a savage slur from Ban's black bow. Toward the end he caught a few words with her, and suddenly begged for his rose.

"Do you think you could catch it," she whispered impulsively, her eyes shining like salt-sprayed lazuli, "if I tossed it from the stairway window? . . . like a play, Stash, *like a play!* . . . Besides, I can't pull it out here. . . ."

"Yes, yes, but sure! . . . I'll slip back by the window when this crowd's gone!"

"But if I do . . . it will be my answer about the play!"

He thought he saw in her eyes that she had decided. And yet—as he ran back, after making his excuse to Hugh and the girls that he had forgotten something—he was breathing fast for fear that she wouldn't dare to decide for him. . . .

The last of the stream of cars had crunched away. Groping in the darkness, he found the rose on the grass. It carried a shred of torn silk . . . she had been hurried or startled. He crushed it to his face as he ran, trying to catch a fragrance that was not the flower's, and found it eluding him in the freshening chill that had come with the morning wind—now whispering in the trees.

BOOK SEVEN: THE BOHEMIAN GIRL

CHAPTER I

I

The fast following days were crowded with plans and maneuverings. Stash lived in a furious turmoil. Balfe's famous old opera, "The Bohemian Girl," was promised for the Alhambra opening, with *Rose Maddon* and *Stanislaw Plazarski* on the topline.

It marked the beginning of a big advertising campaign, to which Marion had pledged himself after hearing Stash's story. Stash put all his savings into a drawing account and wrote McCandlish. The big man, who hardly ever wrote, wired back: "Take your own gait. When you're through begin on me." This message gave Stash a victorious moment.

Rose Maddon came to the first rehearsal with a slightly preoccupied but intrepid air. At the first chance Stash hurried her aside to ask anxiously if it had been very hard.

Rose smiled with a little frosting of the blue eyes: "I told him I had promised—that was all. Yes, and I said I had never broken a promise for just a notion of my own. Then asked him—must I break one for his."

"Rascal gun-runner you!—did you do it that way? Just like he tied me up; only you used it first. And did——"

"You mustn't ask me any more," she returned crisply; "I've said too much already."

"I took a bum cue!" Stash cut an angry gesture with his fist. "Forgive me, won't you?"

She nodded quickly, murmuring: "There's so much——"

There *was* so much! There was often an indescribable din in the big cavern. Kucin was always standing about with a gravity of dark watchful eyes; he and one other young night watchman slept in the house. It was no secret that they were armed.

Tom Shieling, who kept in close touch with Stash and Kucin, stood ready to swear out a warrant if any palpable offence could be connected with Sartos' gang or other Jastrow men.

Yet in the main, this latent alarm, the squat gravity of the gilded cavern, the watchful, scorched bronze head of Kucin peering gravely out of shadowy corners, brought them together in an arm-to-arm feeling of holding a dangerous tenure under storm. Scarcely a time in those first two weeks was it so discouraging but that this powerfully youthful romantic emotion could assert its illusion over them, making them feel that there had never been such esprit as inhabited the tenants of the dubious old Alhambra stronghold.

II

Hardly a day passed without some "fat" notice in Bill Marion's paper. Among other things Stash's experiment with the blacksmith Karshenko made good

copy. He had caught Karsh and Varsh on the lake road one noon, and the blacksmith's elation over his chance to sing before a big crowd in town tormented him so that he was almost at wits-end. Tearing off his hat, he looked down as if surveying himself:

"Me the Devilshoof!—me, Maxim Karshenko—the *Devil?*" He struck Varsh on the chest mischievously—but not softly: "Me—Karsh—the Devil!"

Varsh staggered from Karsh's buffet. He too was exultantly happy. He saw Stash through a light of untold gratitude and affection. The "tall fellow" had not been around the lake for a week, and Varsh credited this disappearance to his young brother. And yet he did not dare to thank him the way he longed to, for that young brother had grown so much like a business man.

It was a stifled excited group that hung in the wings the day of Karsh's try-out, while Karsh in six feet of best black clothes stood gyrating his shoulders in swaggering awkwardness unconquerable. Useless for them to stifle their sniggers, for Karsh knew they were laughing at him. But once he began trolling out "*In the Gipsies' Life*" they ceased their whispering. There was no discussion when it was over. He knew that he had passed inspection, and swaggered over to the group where old "Bobby" Stiles—whom Stash had down from Chicago to sing *Count Arnheim*—was making the gesture of placing a wreath on his head.

By the second day Karsh was calling the veteran Stiles "boy"—and brought with him some of the Koban Lake boys, who rolled in like the hurly-burly cohorts of Czech-land. In jaunty postures of privileged characters they held loud argument before rehearsal began. The truth was that they were acting. On a

242 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

stage of their own conceit and love for their romantic homeland *Bohemia*, which they saw rising into untold glamour from out this dusty bin. They assured Stash that the best view of Hradcany Hill was from Jelini Prokop! One remembered a night of snow storm when Prague Castle had loomed up so and so. . . . If Stash would only have such a scene, with snow falling and the Vlatava river in flood—ah, what a scene! . . . And for another!—the Graben and the sidewalk cafés with the pretty girls! Never was a play produced with so much expert advice in immediate reach.

It was a matter of unholy joy for Forrest (Bobby) Stiles, who pantomimed his outrageous pleasure from behind a convenient flat, for Andre's and Rose Mad-don's sparkling eyes.

"I'd have to be a conjurer to satisfy those fellows!" Stash snorted his relief when they were gone.

Max Dunrin laughed: "Why didn't you tell them, Pal, that sidewalk cafés in a flood were out of your line, but you might manage the pretty girls!"

Such was the extravagance of those days, in which extravagance was a joy and a relief from worry and concern.

III

One warm still noon when Kucin had finished his lunch in the box-office he caught Stash aside and, scowling his bronzed young face, muttered: "I say—I say dat girl would sing if you would ask . . . yes, ask again, because she is sad for something!"

"You mean Marika?"

"Sure—yes!" Kucin answered with a flash of protesting anger . . . how could this happy fortunate fel-

low help but know that she was sorrowing for him to ask her—ask her again?

A flash of intuition and remorse told Stash what the bronzed young Carniolan had sacrificed to ask him. That evening he got a boat at the Koban Hotel boat-house and rowed across the lake in the September evening dusk. He had to listen to Varika's excited talk of: "New electric lines dis side de lake—wid factories! Bezdeks an' Shabbatas sell a strip to Mist Fen. It's a company dat will make de land all more valuable aroun' here."

When he could get away, Stash drew Marika down to the lake shore among the sycamores. "Marika," he said, "listen: why won't you help me out on the chorus. It's hard to get good voices. And I've made some of them mad, and they've talked to their friends. Besides . . . I want you, because . . ."

She waited silently.

"Because you're about the best friend I've got."

The words carried away from him mockingly into the rustling silence. Far off on the lake the pit-pat of an invisible gas-launch sounded.

"If you want me—I will," Marika conceded in a low voice.

"I do!" said Stash. "We don't cross hands any more, Rika; we don't talk like we used to. I'm so busy. And with you . . . maybe it hasn't worked out like you expected over here. I can see—with the railroad coming, and things changing."

"*Can you see, Stash!*" Her voice leapt out in intensity of denial—or hidden hope; in a strange cry that rang in his heart long after he had crossed the lake and ridden into town.

CHAPTER II

I

A heavy night fog dimmed the copper armour of the lobby doors of the old *Alhambra*. Even the electric block letters—THE BOHEMIAN GIRL—seemed bedded like barettes in bluish jeweller's cotton.

The interior was dimly lighted, and even here the fog seeped in. The young electrician, who was sending jets of cheery whistling into the region of the gallery tiers, felt the effect when he stopped: "H-m-m!" he spoke to no one in particular, "my throat is just perfectly owful to-night!" And no one in particular, who happened to be Kucin's Serb friend Sereef, merely stood watching with his solemn brown eyes. "Ain't that so, Frenchy?" the electrician questioned. He was well satisfied with himself to-night. His light schedule had been the only thing that hadn't "gagged" at dress rehearsal the night before.

Stash stood chuckling and talking with Charlie Dalhousie in the box office. He was in a mood of exultation. The receipts had run away ahead of forecast. His organization of defence with Kucin in lead had prevented any serious trouble. The shadow of something vague and ominous under which they had worked for three weeks had almost lifted at last.

Kucin slid in through the fog smoking doorway and handed Stash a slip of yellow legal-tablet. It was signed by Tom Shieling and said: "If anything happens tell Rika that I have followed them."

"*Them!*" Stash muttered angrily . . . then in a flash . . . "Jennika and Diblee!" With a slow mes-

meric motion he shoved the paper into his pocket. Back of him the house seemed immensely still, like a fog-filled vault, except for an occasional far off booming of hammer and phantom whistling.

II

The curtain was due to ring up in a few minutes. There was a veritable waiting line at the back-stage peephole. *Count Arnheim's* guard in their frost-blue uniforms occupied themselves with mustache twiddling in the final pause. The alley door swung open and fog twisted in like a breath of snow above the Christmas-colored throng. . . . Kucin stood looking round for Stash.

Dunrin pointed his pearl-colored shako with its blue pom at a tall gray figure in hussar boots. Rose Madon saw this figure spring right-about and motion towards the alley with a savage squared cap like a sawed-down czapka. She edged forward, a dolicho-blond gipsy in short red skirt and flashing bolero.

"It's nothing!"—a hussar-booted Stash turned back brusquely. "Some of the bunch Rudy Ruzika spotted are hanging round the alley. Rudy wants to fight, but Kucin will hold him in." He thrust his hand back through his Polish tuft with an impatient gesture: "I'd like to get out there!"

Rose brought over the baby girl who filled the rôle of *tiny* Arlene, and pushing the baby hand into Stash's with trembling playfulness whispered: "You hold him from going out there!"

Stash looked down, his dark eyes twinkling, and suddenly stooped and swung her up into his arms. She clutched his shoulder knot and settled against his

shoulder. He paraded his small prize among the proud grenadiers and ladies, resigning her finally to *Buda*, the nurse.

The curtain rolled up as the hunter's chorus crashed out joyously: "*Up with the Banner!*"

CHAPTER III

I

The Fentrees were in orchestra seats. Fentree glanced up at the balcony where he saw a crowd of smiling, chattering Czechs, waiting eagerly for the curtain to rise.

High up near the gold and cerulean ceiling sat a woman with a blue and pink hat making a covert of gloom for startling black eyes that almost, thus hidden, reached an effect of wild beauty. But the crumbled-in white cheeks showed the exaggerated Polish cheek bones like a death's-head. . . . From up here it was like looking down into the pit of a powerhouse. The shining bellies of violins and cellos were like throbbing machines. The polished bows flashed over them—quivering—as if waiting for a stronger surge of power from that squat generator, the kettle drum. There were moments when it seemed that she might fall forward and be thrashed to pieces down there; but this was such a mental vagary as she was used to. . . . Behind her shaking program she drew in with a short fierce breath the pinch of white powder drawn from a paper in her hand-bag. Then with gnawing eagerness consulted her program again where the black-letter *Stanislaw Plazarski* glared like sharp twisted music.

The overture had begun. The heat, the perfume of the ushers' atomizers and the warm crowd, rising to the ceiling, seemed to stop her breath. As the lights darkened, that perfume seemed like a gas thrown off by those throbbing machines, which was lifting the house like a balloon—up—up!

More lights fell off—and through the darkness she saw that terrifying sweet music coiling in violet and green folds. She had ceased to rise—but swayed out into another dimension where she saw things from all around—instead of but one side. . . . A far off thunder carried the curtain aloft . . . and in a pale blue flood of early morning the stage lifted up to her . . . and a storm of youthful voices burst against her face like a moving rich wind. "*Up with the Banner!*"

It was all so starry clear down there: like puppet soldiers of a kingdom in her brain, she thought she could shift them about. She did. But the union of color and sound made it hard to separate one thing and savor it intensely. . . . And she must be able to fix on just one thing—when *he* came on.

Those swaying boys in frosty, Christmas-blue uniforms were fine and splendid, and the girls like dolls with beautiful lined eyebrows and flashing eyes. . . . Just a stage of course. . . . Yet it reminded her of a Christmas in Roslogi when a little girl, in Poland. . . . That became the present and this stage the past. . . . Frantically she inverted them, and brought the present forward. . . .

II

The baby girl with the bright hair is carried off; the guardsmen troop away. . . . Suddenly there on the bright empty stage a tall spindling figure staggers out.

Her heart hammers so that she can hardly steady the vision. He tears off the savage, black hat and shows the close cut Polish tuft. Ah, beyond a doubt! . . . But if she could see him better! . . . fiercer! . . . through that frittering brilliance of vision. She found herself on her feet, and sank back panting. . . . He was singing.

The voice rang hoarsely—fitting the Polish exile's exhausted entrance. But that hoarseness, which was the voice's fault, thrilled her with the terrifying reverberation of a Stash taller, stronger, more splendid than she had ever dreamed he would be. Gipsies like brilliant colored insects suddenly surrounded him, robbing him. His voice like a savage chime rolled up to her, rolled a sweet doom through her sinking, dying heart. . . .

Behind the raging gipsy chief, with the stolen *Arlene* in his arms, the bridge fell crashing—in a shiver of blue sparklets—to the *br-r-oum-br-r-oum* of that squat generator of thunder in the pit. A sigh waved over the house; merged in the falling of the curtain.

III

Behind the curtain the ground sheets rumbled into line—for the street-fair scene. Stash ran up the alley and finding Kucin on steady watch came back to Rose Maddon with the damp air still fresh on his gipsy costume.

"Feeling fine, aren't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, but tired as though I had been all through, instead of just beginning."

"That's from being screwed up so long. There's a dropped feeling just before you go on."

"I wish I had as much spirit to throw away as you. I believe you'd rather something happened out there than not! You've enjoyed all that danger this last month. I think I knew you enjoyed it that morning the channel fell."

"I think I'd like a drag-out fight with *Florestein* right in the middle of next!" he admitted, grinning.

Rose smiled a little quizzically, a little enigmatically, and he turned to hunt up Marika. He was a little startled to hear Marika speak of Rose.

"Yes, she does look mighty pretty," he responded, angry with himself for his conscious effort to use an off-hand tone.

Florestein and a tall blue Hussar brushed past them in the narrow entrance, singing under their breath:

"When *Florestein*
Sings '*Wine! Wine!*'
I'll swear he means it!"

They broke off for a piece of waggish business, in which "Bobby" Stiles demanded a rehearsal of *Florestein's* slapping. . . . *Arlene* made a wicked but airy pass at his foolish face. . . . The curtain reefed up with its faintly ominous rumble.

IV

Rose Maddon as *Arlene* now slept by the gipsy tilt-wagon in the glow of a flickering camp-fire, and *Taddeus*, the young Polish exile, watched over her.

In that haunted light of woodland mystery the stolen little royal lady woke to sing her song of well-dreamed memories. And the melody, like her dream, spiraled back into echoing halls of wistful grandeur—

up dreamy stairways—dying away in yearning for the face that had been missing there:

“But I also dreamt
Which charmed me most—
That you loved me still the same—
That you loved me—
You loved me still—
The same!”

And *Taddeus* then, lifting his head higher as if proud of the very desolation of his costume—like the glorious tatters of a sea-change—caught *Arlene's* hands and drew her to him. In that moment all the confusion, menace and worry of the past week sank from Stash's mind. . . . He stood with his arm about *Arlene* and listened with bowed head. . . . The old naïve sweet song swelled free again, and on a darkened stage Rose Maddon stood alone in a *golden spot* . . . and Stash Plazarski on the rainbow rim beside her.

v

Marynia Cardoul, watching that spot, felt that there was an immense white crystal mounted in her forehead, and that Stash and the beautiful little lady were vibrating there. Her heart was singing, crying. His big, hawked face was somehow graced and softened by the light; his Polish tuft flared back in a grandiose curve, reminding her of . . . yes, of *Bolish, Bolish!* . . . A gust of darkening memory blew out the crystal, and she found herself sobbing violently with convulsive dry sobs in the darkness.

Someone, seeing her agitation, offered her a pair of clumsy marine glasses, but she was unable to hold them steady enough to see. She was somehow fearfully

happy. The perverse bitter effort that had brought her to Detroit first, and then here, had given her this height of dream, where the very ecstasy seemed to purify the past and promise an escape from the nameless horror beyond.

CHAPTER IV

I

Back-stage there was a relief from tension. The egg-shell-blue Hussars and the Court ladies felt a tide of high spirits rising round them. Some sang in low rumbling voices the trifling ballad of Stiles' invention:

"When *Florestein*
Sings '*Wine! Wine!*'
I'll swear he means it!—
It's not an empty song:
What then redeems it?—
But wine! wine! *wine!*—
When the play is done
And *Arlene* queens it! . . .
Eh—*Florestein!* . . ."

Stash had on again his Hussar boots, which it would seem he had trod in carefully during the twelve years of intermission. He shouldered down the gangway to *Arlene's* side, who wore a *peau de soie* of French lilac color in Empire suavity.

"*And Arlene queens it!*" whispered Stash. "Will you go with me, Rose Madder, afterward? . . . Petrie and Farrander have sent out word to *Velvar's*. I won't go unless I can take my tricorn-flower girl along. It may be the last. . . ."

She hesitated.

"You'll be going . . . and I'll be gone . . . and Lord knows where I'll run across my cornflower gun-runner again!"

She raised a daring smile and nodded.

II

A rumor of disorder boomed behind them, and turning quickly they saw the alley door swing open and Rudy Ruzika's broad grinning face in the mist. He beckoned with drunken assurance . . . and another face came into the blanched circle of the outside lamp. . . . Bewildered yet ferocious by flashes as he lurched forward . . . the face was Varsh. They came blundering in with the booming breathing of drunken men.

For a moment Varsh stared round, dazzled by daunting guardsmen and beautiful bright girls. He threw out his arms as if to appeal to them. But Stash flung an arm across his shoulder and swung him to the wall. In an instant Varsh hurled free:

"No you don'! Stash-a-boy!" His voice boomed like thunder it seemed to Stash. Varsh's eye had caught Rose's, and his frenzied mind struck fire: "I would tell you how you helped, littlest girl," he began bravely, "but—that big one, Christ damn him! he come back! . . ." His throat clicked and he seemed about to cry.

Stash heard his own voice calling hoarsely: "*Karsh!*" He saw Karshenko lunge forward—but stop distressed before Varsh's savage glare: "No, you won'!" His voice rang roaring in the narrow gangway, "*So I could kill you all!*" He stared about him for

the effect of this, half astounded by his own terrible words.

In that moment Stash took the one chance his own horror-stricken mind suggested and hurled himself upon the frenzied man. It was such a struggle that no one could help. Swaying from side to side of the gangway it crashed through the door.

The cold air whistled like fire to Stash's heated brain, and getting an iron in-grip on Varsh's coat he hurled him with all his strength headlong down the rough boarding of the alley. He stood just long enough to see Varsh raise himself and lurch against the trickling dead-wall, and then sprang back into the crowded gangway.

He stared about him—strangely like Varsh had first stood. To Rose Maddon there was a horrifying resemblance. Then with a hoarse, harsh voice—"Go on!"—he rushed to his dressing-room.

III

His chin was broken and bleeding. He dabbed it with alcohol and clotted it with powder; working with a dry, dead mind, blasted it seemed by an incredible shame. It was all over—everything. He pushed back his Polish tuft and smoothed his sleeves. To stop now would be madness for his beating head. He could only go on. The curtain had rung up.

As he left the room he saw the crumpled paper Tom had sent and snatched it up. All the terrible riddle of his shame seemed to lie in that yellow paper. Fragments of sinister meaning whirled through his head, only to make him feel the spider-web horror of the town which had crushed him once more:—Sartos—

Jastrow's—the ironic Marantle face—Whaleback's Castle—Maddon's glittering eyes;—and then—Rose Maddon singing *Arlene*!—a hundred echoing hours ago!—Oh, Rose! . . . He dropped swiftly down the iron stairs and appeared among the groups in the wings—stony faced. One or two glanced aside at him, but turned quickly back to watch *Arlene*—sitting alone in her castle room, dreaming sadly over her gipsy dress and the lost charm of other days.

IV

Across the black cramped figures and bale-fire of the orchestra, across the shimmering house—like a heat wave—danced the tremor of *Arlene's* hot longing for the past. It choked Marynia Cardoul. She longed to cry for her own tortured past which even in its dark spots looked bright enough now.

It was like a burst of dawn for her when *Taddeus* came on. But almost at once a frightful distraction seized her. A harsh defiance in his singing thrilled her with the fear that she had been merely dreaming. . . . She half rose from her seat and fell back again. She had exhausted the false power that had brought her to this height and furnished it out with glory. She fumbled in her hand-bag helplessly.

Then like a burst of storm-light the thrill of fear turned to one of glory. The whole house, it seemed to her, began to tremble with the hoarse voice that—charging higher—sent echoes crying away like birds beating stormily on to darkened horizons:

“Then you'll remember—
You'll remember me! . . .”

The house—as if shocked and saddened—did not respond; but watched a little uneasily the distracted gipsy queen's exposure of *Taddeus'* presence alone with *Arlene*. *Devilshoof's* antics added a distorting stress. Someone in the gallery laughed falteringly—a little wildly. . . .

It was Marynia Cardoul. She knew at last that something was wrong with Stash. In the rush to hide from the stage guests he had broken open the cut on his chin and a trickle of blood marked a red crease on his knotted face. A horror of some unknown end shook her. But a triumph awaited *Taddeus*.

He proclaimed *Arlene* free from any low love for a gipsy stroller and himself Count Taddeus of Poland by virtue of patents which he bore. A fear tore through his mind that he had forgotten the paper that served that office. At the last minute he remembered the yellow note that he had thrust into his tunic. As he commenced to sing he felt that he had mounted to the last high peak of defiance—a defiance full of strange glory:

“When the fair land
Of Poland
Was trod by the hoof
Of the ruthless invader—
When Might—
With spear to the bosom
And flame to the roof
Completed her triumph
O'er Right!—
In that moment of danger
When Freedom invoked
All the fetterless sons
Of her pride!—
In brave ranks as dauntless
As Freedom e'er yoked—
I fought—and I fell
By Her side!”

256 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

The words rang on, like the mounting of lofty bronze helmets to a high Parade.

"My birth is noble—
Unstained my crest!
As is thine own—
Let this attest! . . ."

He did not release but held in his extended hand the paper on which Tom Shieling had written: "Tell Rika I am following them."

The house in conversion to his mood thrust out in catpaws of applause—merging into a concerted swell. Turning to them he sang again—as if he made his last call on the Glorious Defiance.

V

Marynia Cardoul felt the lighted house vanishing away from her. Her heart was rocking like an engine too strong to hold. That machinery of black beetle men in the pit had wound herself and Stash to an unendurable tension. . . . And then . . . *had she screamed?* . . . They were trying to kill him!—the red spangled woman with the knife. People were staring angrily at her. She was on her feet and struggling to get out. She knew that she had strength enough to get around through the alley—as she had somewhere—at the *Frontenac*—to see what had made that terrible change in him. . . . And if she had shamed him . . . she would kill herself! . . . Oh, but then, if he would only say some word to her! . . .

Her heart pounded so. It was easier to lean against the alley wall and so move on. A rumble like an underground railway shook the building . . . the audi-

ence moving out. Below the aureoled light at the stage door a couple tall Hussars lounged out to smoke. In a moment she had pushed past these staring fellows and muttered hoarsely to the fireman who seemed to bar the way to her. . . . Suddenly—there before her loomed Stash. . . . Beyond, the golden girl was turning away—but stopped with frightened face . . . Stash too seemed startled, the bloody cleft on his chin darkening as his face grew white.

She moved forward with vague glazed smile . . . eager to ease his mind . . . to tell him. . . . She reached vaguely towards his big hand—lifting to his throat, and saw—that he was gray with horror—*of her!* . . . “Oh!——” she gasped hoarsely. He had never towered so splendidly before her! “Stash!”—she held out her hands—partly to him, partly to keep herself from falling. He pulled back with a harsh shapeless sound and burst away. . . . The fireman caught her by one arm. . . .

She caught sight of *his* bronze head mounting the stairway, and turning let the fireman lead her out into the alley.

CHAPTER V

I

At Shabbona station Stash learned that a woman with a blue and pink hat had taken a northbound train. Because they described her as a sick woman he seemed to see her lying horrible and pitiful on the dirty yellow benches. . . .

The old station was part of his life. He had been so boyishly confident on that long-ago morning when

he had left Detroit: as bright as sunshine he saw the gala pink and blue hat with the smiling face of Rynia dropping back—swiftly back! It twisted his throat like a tourniquet. He saw now how she had longed to keep him—but had sent him on to separate him from the dark road they were going. . . . And then to-night when she had come back for one last word before sinking into what swimming horror he dared not vision, then, then he had pulled away from her. If he could only take back that gesture of repulsion! At such moments he kept his face away from Kucin, who had followed him to the station, to hide his grimace of anger and horrible grief.

That dark young fellow released him with a last iron hand pressure, losing the white face almost instantly in the condensing steam that coiled through the train vestibules.

II

It was still dark as the train whirled on into the North—the North which had brimmed his boyish brain with azure dreams;—and it seemed as if he were passing beyond the bounds of life into a land of unknown cold and mist and a half-life of dreary shadows. With face against the window he saw the pallid lighted stretches of Shabbona and Wacaser slip back. A heart sickening rush of the night's memories pressed forward. He saw uniforms like the blurred blue-green of passing streets; saw Louise and Marika, vividly moving in darkling eyes and dainty forms—and Rose so golden grained and shining, with dark eyebrows and oval-pointed smile. He heard her voice echoing through walls of a dead and saddened fairyland. He heard the mocking voices of Petrie and Dunrin—"When the

play is done and *Arlene* queens it, eh—Florestein!" . . . The engine whistled far ahead—chiming bleakly as it scoured on into the dark marsh-lands—towards the Lakes. . . . How long ago, how long ago it seemed!

In those last moments in the dressing-room he had been unable to crush the sick wonder if Rose would be waiting for him. But she had gone—fled. It was Marika who had clung to his hand—and sent Kucin after him. It brought a hot convulsion to his breast that eased him like a scorching compress. Ah, Marika! He saw her and those crossroads friends as so real and dear amidst a shifting, swirling world of inimical half real people—like shadows of the stretching night outside.

Gradually the darkness lifted from the ashen shapes that guard the Lake. The dunes seemed lighted by some dusk secret lamp. And a little later his burning eyes turned dully to a flame of blue that was the Great Lake in splendid morning gleaming.

BOOK EIGHT: FLYING GLORY

CHAPTER I

I

Detroit. . . . Stash had slept a little on the train, but wakened under the mystification of a great city that seemed to his blurred burning mind more like some splendid promising dream than a place of real people.

He turned to a part of town where cheap hotels figured under names such as *Avena*, *Luxor* and *St. Charles*, such hotels as advertise in the want columns vaguely as "strictly first class"—sickeningly pretentious names and desperately run down surroundings, where the nadir of melancholy can be antagonized by a sick mind, which perversely finds in such places something like a dim melodious grandeur of desolation. An instinct told Stash that if he could find his mother anywhere it would be in such a region as this.

He took a room in the *New Excelsior*—which vainly assumed that there had been a shabbier, less dingy gray and *older* Excelsior, with dirtier Nottingham lace curtains dabbling at its windows; and slept throughout the afternoon. . . . He sprang to his feet as if to escape from a haunted world where beautiful friendly faces were going the dark way of dreams with strange unknowing smiles; and found himself facing a more

devastating fantasia of reality: for wandering out on the dusking streets he saw his own once beautiful mother sinking, even now sinking into unthinkable swimming vaults of horror.

He walked on and on; out through portals of huddled brown buildings into wide sweeping avenues with sleeking motors swirling into misty depths; on past wider sweeping foyers where lights were cropping out in dwindling prospect; on toward the serene greenish rotunda of the turquoise west, where he saw a star as white as the cryptic beacon on another world shore.

There was no one in the city whom he cared to face. He passed a small theatrical hotel at the lower end of Cadillac Square, where an automatic piano was storming off furious silvery roulades; and sat on an iron bench near by. Dusk was coming fast, and far off through the hushing murmur of the spreading city he heard the prolonged booming of a Lake leviathan—like a ponderous bell that is stroked rather than rung. His thoughts ran back to the night on the dancing pier when he had promised Rose Maddon nonchalantly that he would come back to Durand to handle the *Ad Masque*. He shrank in on himself before that picture. What a report he would have to make to McCandlish! He did not know that Andre would soon be giving the ticket jobber a story of the *Alhambra* opening and of *Taddeus* that was far from one of failure, and that before the week was over they would be searching the city for him.

II

His thought now was to see Nadelka. In a fluttering dimness of vision he boarded a car at the *Pon-*

chartrain corner. His face must have startled Nadelka, for she hurried him over to a dark corner table:

"You seem to be queer when you come in—I'd a said 'shot'!" She laughed and ran on in her curving way, white shoulders alternately hunched against her black hair: "I was admire you when I hear about your hit in the big Mac theatre, and if I had know then it was the same boy I use to know I would have try to see you."

Stash clenched his teeth desperately and asked gravely: "Delka, do you know—have you seen my mother lately?"

Her face flushed slightly and she looked aside: "No—no!" She had evidently heard something since that night last summer, but what it was she would not be pleased to tell. Fear filled Stash as with a strange tingling liquor. "Good-bye," he said rather wildly, "good-night—I'll—maybe I'll see you again."

He found his way back to the New Excelsior, and threw himself on the dingy, mussed-up bed. His shoulders moved with long, sobbing breaths; but he was not crying—at least not his spirit;—*that* moved aside as if to leave his body struggling for the damp air that seeped through the lace curtains; *that* stood off wondering and dazed, and joining now and then in a passionate convulsion with his shaking shoulders.

III

He slept far into the next morning, and finding a new grimness of usage started out to wander the sections of the city that he thought she might travel. The thought of food made him sick; but it was after he had eaten a little and felt its feverish stimulation that he

allowed himself to dream of how he would meet her. Just so, he would say—"Rynia—Rynia!" His hands went out—his eyes burned—he presented the unconscious picture of a big blind boy with hacked-out features lifted eagerly and hands starting before him in an anguish of fancy that he was learning at last to see. . . .

But reaction came and with it the drab desperation of such a search. A new disease of powerlessness was seeping into the corners of his so confident soul—which had always taken its aims with a rush.

Among the old haunts was the *Frontenac*. He found himself in the alley talking to the door-keeper, who told him he was looking bad.

"Somebody was askin' for you the other day," he continued. "She says, 'Has anyone seen Pally Plazarski?—I havn't seen him for a year.' Zylde's her name. She's in a tabloid on this week's. Say! it's a tab with the razzibo an' zazz!"

Stash knitted his brows—Zylde—Zylde Dermody—he remembered the fresh-skinned Irish girl in the "*Shaneen*" chorus who had swung to Company 2 the second year out.

"If you're askin' me I'll say she's a live one," the door-man ran on. His grin relaxed—for some reason young Plazarski seemed frowning and resentful. Maybe there had been something between them.

Suddenly Stash asked if he had heard anything about Cardoul.

"Nothing since that he's gone down the runs for good."

Stash hurried down the alley with a stifled feeling. At the mouth a trio of girls wheeled in, and one of

them stopped abruptly and called Stash's name in a musical but coarse intonation.

He turned to see a Zyl da Dermody of more incisive lips and eyes, a vivid reminiscence of the little dancer at Clan Na Gael picnics. She held her head high: "Pally Plazarski!"

He escaped her invitation to come "in back" by making the excuse that he had a check to see it front. He bought one at the kiosk and sat in the dusk waiting, glancing idly at the program which promised a grand winter opening after the summer vaudeville. . . . It was all so familiar—and yet so far off.

The tabloid came on, and the coryphees rang their way with anklets and armlets of bells through a song that clamored: "Something Goes Tingle-Ingle-Linging." Stash felt Zyl da Dermody's eyes flashing into his; and fumbling for his program to hide his own eyes he found the Killarney rose which Rose had worn, matted in his inside coat pocket. Automatically he smelled it; and the gesture brought back the breath he had drawn that magic night, craving unattainable sweetness as his fancy reeled on in fainting images—red rose to white rose—white rose to melting snow, burning like wine. The dead cravings trooped through his heart like a mourning melody.

The rushing finale which swirled out a stale dust and humid perfume antagonized and sickened him. He saw its slippery thrust as from a bulging power-house of passion with pistons thumping. He heard the chiding flat little voices with the babyish clutch in their sensuous whine. The Johnnies who had been caught by such poisoned honey had always seemed to him like effete decayed old men. Full of the rush and swing of life he had brushed them aside contemptuously. Now

he felt the penetrating decay as if it saturated his old dream of Rose and even his happy play with Marika—as if nothing was free from its stigma.

Something told him to go—to go!—to rush out and break his head somewhere. But he stayed on, watching dully the opening of an Ellis Island sketch. A little shock ran through him as he glanced at the title—“*The Violin That Talked Its Way In.*” It reminded him instantly of his own first appearance with “*The Violin That Talks Patter.*”—So does Vaudeville repeat and copy itself. . . .

The “Commission” listened stolidly to the Italian mother’s plea that, though short on the required money, her boy had a special “seegerette” for playing that would soon bring them wealth. The slim, red-cheeked boy advanced then and played with a dithering vivacity that set the heavy brogans under the commissioners to wagging, and saved the sketch from a touching close.

In a moment Stash’s mind had swung back to the *Savoy* period. He saw the dusky tiers and felt the ghostly, snowy gust of the spotlight. He saw again Marika’s white, eager face and the thrilling quiver of her caught-up lip as he twittered “*I love you.*” With Stash, Marika’s love had run back to the time when he, a little boy, had found her the kindest, sweetest playmate, and as such had neglected her.

Oh, Marika!—what did she think of him now? He found that he was clenching his hands and twisting in his chair. He felt that Marika could have helped him, could have explained the treacherous, sickening evil that had carried down all his dreams. . . . He could bear it no longer; and walked out into the afternoon, which had suddenly turned gray and murmurous with gusting wind.

IV

Zylda Dermody, who had been watching him from back-stage, turned out of the alley and called his name. He turned to see her flushed, laughing smile, a vivid stain in the drab alley atmosphere.

He hesitated . . . hardly knowing what to do . . . the bleak ocean of the humming city seemed like an endless roaring sadness that had come around him.

She puckered her red lips and whistled flippantly—*"Something seems tingle-ingle-inging"*—just pertly waiting for him. . . .

But something else was chiming more thin and sweet—far off in the corner of his head—like a star. He raised his cap, and with face smiling in a kind of haggard, shining daze—turned and walked on.

Winter was in the air, and down the long echoing avenues the roar of afternoon traffic boomed with a sounding melancholy murmur.

CHAPTER II

I

The third day had passed without news of Stash. Andre had lost not a minute, after arriving, in going to big Mac. And, although she remembered that the Andrew Fentrees didn't approve of the ticket jobber, she urged him to bring any word he cared to talk over to the house on Broad Chandos.

Towards the end of her account it had been difficult to make way through his frequent *bahoos*—and he

gripped her hand with such rough energy that she charged that unfairly with the smart in her eyes. And in his bear's blundering way he made matters worse by recognizing what she tried to conceal:

"Fine I know how you're feelin'. But I'll lay myself endlong to find him. The castaway lad! . . . I'll lay myself endlong! Don't fash yourself now, don't you——"

"I'm not!" flashed Andre tearfully, angrily. "It's you!—I mean—I'm so glad you're going to help!"

II

The big ticket broker unearthed the first rumor, from the *Frontenac* door-man. He was wonderfully excited, and when nothing came of it grew correspondingly depressed. Added to this, he had nearly alienated Tallant from the search by offering the thin young newspaperman an honorarium for the extra time he spent in the search.

And then Tallant had come with the report of a Bois Blanc Street dance hall and a young fellow he had seen there at the piano: "He sat like a rock, pounding it as if he hated it. Big shoulders—rocky head with a promontory aft. Does that hit it? You know I saw him two nights last summer—that's all. His face looked too hawkish—like a white Indian. . . . No one seemed to know him . . . called him 'Polak Stan.' But I found he stayed on *Deversuance*—that string of cheap hotels."

III

It was a cold cloudy morning when Andre and Janvier investigated the *New Excelsior* on Tallant's

report. There was no elevator; and the smell in the hallways of sulphur, extinct newspapers and tobacco filled Andre with suspicion and repulsion.

In the moments of waiting she could only try to picture Stash moving through this red-carpeted hall and force her mind to believe that there hadn't been some strange mistake. It was only when she saw the tall Pole boy standing in the door that she knew they weren't mistaken and that she must keep from her voice the hurt quiver for such a different Stash—standing there uncertainly—afraid to smile at them—afraid to retreat—irresolute and smelling pitifully of cheap barber's lotion. Though he had just been shaven, it had left his face white and unflushed. She was horribly afraid of crying.

"Oh, Stash!" she said, and getting quick control of her voice and taking his hand: "We've had such a time finding you. . . . I'm mad!" Again she wanted to cry. She found that she was stroking his hand. "Why, why didn't you let us know and help? Raoul and I are going to . . . never let you go again! . . . Let's get out of this place first, and you can tell while we're going along. . . . Oh-h. . . ." He had turned abruptly and rushed back into his room. . . . "My cap!" She heard his hoarse voice breaking.

It was some moments before he came out again, and Andre saw that he would be unable to tell anything for some time. They descended the stair flights. At the quiet Greek coffee-house where Janvier left them the first thing she insisted on was that he must find a better lodging.

"Some place like that——" he said harshly, "*she's* living."

"But Stash," said Andre, confronted by what she

saw must be a malignant fixed idea, "not a better place . . . only one that isn't so . . . so drugged looking."

He agreed finally to this. There followed a silence; and Andre said: "Jennika is back, Stash; married to Tom—and I think going to be happy."

He seemed lightened by this news.

"I can't remember any more home news. I've been too worried to do anything here. But is there anything you're anxious to hear about?"

She saw him clench his jaws in eager but baffled anxiety to produce a name. . . . She was ready to tell him about Rose Maddon. . . . He drew his eyes from the window and muttered with fearful eagerness: "What does Marika"—he cleared his voice—"Marika think . . . about me?"

"Oh-h——" Andre's eyes brightened, as if she could bring him here a splendid offer beyond his hopes: "Stash—if you'll only believe me—she is proud of you now!"

He seemed a little not to grasp it. This touched her more than any sudden demonstration. "But I mean you!—Stash—she's proud of you!"

For the first time a flush of color came to his face, and he tried to speak, but only disjointed fragments came: "Could she! I threw her for Rose Maddon, didn't I?—didn't I seem to? I would have killed Varsh that night, I tried hard enough! I didn't care about him and Rika. And then I pulled away from Rynia!—like I'd hit her. . . ." He ended on an eager breath, as if he waited for her to assure him that in spite of all he had done Marika could still believe in him.

IV

Janvier came back with a package of "Vasconselles." "The factory is just around the corner," he explained, "and several nicer kiosks than this." The first invasion of Greek and Turkish coffee-houses had come this year and was yet a novelty in the city. "You get a room around here, and Andre and I will come round to sip at one of these coffee cabooses. . . . If you don't mind I'll bring Tallant, too."

He scrawled on a torn paper, and, wrapping a coin in it, asked Stash to hand it to the Greek tobacco merchant on his way back. Not till long afterward did Stash guess that the coin was a ruse, or that Janvier had recognized in the large lumpy Greek—Vasconselles—a lover of humanity and had asked him to help the big young Pole. The coin was mere make-weight, an excuse for the password which Janvier counted on the Greek to understand.

V

"Tell that young man——" said the tobacco merchant with the amber-tinted, white mustache, receiving the coin, "that I shall lay over for him some special 'Stamboul Stamp'—I guess that is what he wants. And you—I can tell by your eyes you are smoking a bad brand."

When Stash explained that he was not smoking at all, and Vasconselles had enjoyed a slow swaying wheeze, Stash could hardly help warming to the big man with the shaggy white hair and the pansy brown eyes. He even let himself be shown over the factory

which was a factory in no real sense, but a cubicle of Oriental pungence.

The next day he brought his few things to a room in the brown brick boarding-house where the tobacco merchant lived; and before long the great keystone-shaped man, twinkling behind his black-rimmed pince-nez was a familiar friendly figure to Stash—and to Raoul and Andre, who came frequently to sip with Stash at a nearby coffee-house. Andre named him "*Mr. Strix*"—for the owl effect of his glasses and hair, and for a handle to slyly commend him with in his own hearing. Andre was adept in these practises; and it startled her to have him beam across the table at *Gossians* one day: "I would tell you why you call me Mr. Strix!"

Andre turned pink and laughed breathlessly: "Why! I didn't know you knew, but . . ."

"I know that Latin name for the owl—*strix pratincola*—the barn owl. I hear you say it sometimes—I see your friend's face—I look in the glass when I clip my beard—well, in a minute—a pretty long minute, for my slow brain—I see a funny connection!"

His voice was actually tremulous with his feeling of temerity in exposing her. His ponderous keystone shape in its pearl-gray cutaway trembled as if he confronted a minataur. Suddenly Andre burst into a laugh which the others were compelled to join; Vasconselles shaking like a mountain now that his fright was over; and Stash joining with the first audible laugh he had given in weeks.

"Do you forgive me?" Andre wiped her eyes.

"Well, let me say——" the big man became emphatic, "I am Mr. Strix forever on. I would rather

be that to such nice friends than Vizier of the Golden Horn."

One day McCandlish joined them at *Gossians*, but did not come afterward. Oddly enough, the big man seemed vaguely jealous of the polished old Greek.

CHAPTER III

I

No one had greater faith in Stash than big Mac. He watched his new work on *The News*; and finally sought out Tallant and apologized for his conduct towards the pallid youngish newspaperman.

"Speakin' of that offer now—bahoo!—I see it was a shame to offer you money! . . . But it was a mere matter of gettin' you to give more time to it. . . . I was—I'm tellin' you—just desperate to locate him before he got sucked under! I wasn't strictly accountable. I know you don't like my line of business . . . but we're one in wantin' to help *him*—I take it."

The hardness slipped from Tallant's protuberant black eyes. He saw that McCandlish had come up to the local room ostensibly to see Stash, but perhaps with the hidden intent of placating himself. A sudden irrepressible warmth crept into his heart, and his nervous spasmodic smile broke out.

McCandlish, leaning against the green baize table that flanked the room, and glancing down at his cigar point, went on to say that he hoped for the big lad to "get in gangway" on the show business. If he himself could go back and start afresh he'd like best

to build and produce plays. There was a mere possibility, he muttered—by which he meant that it was his keenest intent and hope!—that the lad could do all that *for* him! . . . He waved a vague circle with his cigar and glanced out inquiringly from watery gray eyes.

Tallant was going to reply, when Stash came in—and seeing the two men hurried up smiling. His face had filled in again and hardened; but there was still a lingering trace of those despairing weeks of search, in a look of stern wistfulness that somehow mingled weakness and strength. The same mixture was in his feeling about his search: he more firmly clung to it because he had lost hope.

Tallant had on his hat, about to leave for the afternoon, and suggested that he go along with McCandlish if he was leaving.

II

When they got out on the street Tallant took up the talk again where they had left off.

“There’s something in what you say about growing up a boy in the playworld air. But the practical sense in the finger-tips—you spoke of—I’ve wondered if it isn’t mostly the verve that knows by vibration what the verve of youth will respond to. He seems to have lost a good deal of that—that he had so much of.”

“That he had so fine!—that he had so fine!” exclaimed McCandlish—an audible sigh lumbering out of his big chest, which was covered with a fancy vest just as on the morning when little Stash had chuckled to himself that “those were the big engines of him!”

“I understand you,” he said, “but that’s all coming back, I hope. I couldn’t rightly understand what’s

the matter of him," he muttered gruffly gentle; "but if you'll be helpin' him betimes," he shot out, "it's the best that can happen to him. . . . You understand—with your talk—" he ran on gruffly—"and your books—and with—" he waved his hand—"the company of youth that only youth can give! . . . Y'know it's the business of youth to be happy an' pleasure gatherin'. . . . The Business of Youth . . . I mind a play of that name . . . That business ought to be attended to!"

"Most carefully!" Jerry Tallant laughed, "or where would the theatre business come from!"

They parted with a zest of unsuspected friendliness.

CHAPTER IV

I

By mid-winter Stash was putting in a full day on *The News*, and looking forward to the "ghost's walking" for the entertainment he could then afford to give to Andre, Janvier and Tallant. Between times he lived very cheaply at the brown rooming-house, and learned to know most of the neighborhood through the affectionate familiarity of Vasconselles' eyes—even to turning in good copy on these, such as "The Black Walrus,"—as he called the fire crew captain on the corner.

It had been a memorable night for Stash when Tallant showed him the draft of a five-act play which he had been tinkering on, and they began together a work that was to last all winter.

The newspaperman recognized that Plazarski had

a knack of knocking down a too "liney" part and framing it up again into a passage of nervous vigor. This often served the purpose of suggesting something entirely new to Tallant, while at other times he was content merely to polish it.

In the meantime Stash found the local room a circulating library of ideas, books and virile terse gossip. He spent the evenings at Chittenden Square or Broad Chandos Street, or in reading and writing on the play which Tallant called "ours." Tallant confessed that he would have barged along with an increasing baggage of scenarios never carried beyond the layout stage, unless he had been able to harness Stash's drive to "*The Heart of Mr. Strix*," as they called their detective and old home play. To Tallant young Plazarski seemed like a coal mine carrying an energy fresh and scarcely charred by the experience that had seemed a blasting fire to Stash.

II

Spring made a sudden advance in March, and the houseman in Chittenden Square told Tallant that "we hadn't had such a chancy blink in eight years." The newspaperman was nervously elated over the prospective production of the "five decker." He was fairly irascible at the impromptu celebration at *St. Leger's Arbor*. To this Andre came—with Janvier—because she had been their best "odds-on-abettor," according to Tallant, and because she had insisted on "Mr. Strix" going into the play layout—pansy eyes, nose-pinchers, keystone shape and all.

It was an evening like that when Cardoul Senior had bought Stash his violin at Kreuger's. There seemed to be a turquoise scratch of Springland at the

foot of every deepening avenue. Blue crocus lights cropped out in shadowy courts and corners as dusk came. Before the little dinner was over it grew dark. Andre complained at Stash's silence.

Tallant joined her: "Of course we'll rip it all to pieces and do it over probably;—but let's for to-night enjoy the illusion that it's done. And that Mac is counting his commissions."

"Writing off my losses!" McCandlish grumbled with grumpy cheerfulness.

"Yes, let's talk of something else," Andre agreed. "For instance—that if it hadn't been for me you'd never have had old Quilter's speech—'Mr. Strix is *the man around the corner* that everyone knows—but that *nobody* knows into the heart of him.'"

"Oh, yes!" snapped Tallant, "that's something so different from the old subject! Let's see: I saw Lee Luders yesterday. Fifth Avenue and Melody Lane all over. He can step up to lanky sveltes and —'You've got a dandy walk for musical comedy; phone me at the address given'—slip his card and bow himself off—*with* a topper!"

"Doing lovely!" said Andre; "Mr. Mac, your turn. . . . Lead out in a debate: Is musical comedy better than Grand——"

"It is!—" said McCandlish, "go no further. Look what you'll be getting in it! Life isn't all frosting and fricassee, but a good music show makes you feel it is for two hours and forty-five minutes—if they aren't stingy."

III

The lights suddenly blinked out, and McCandlish's protesting *taroo-bahoo!* echoed in the darkness. A

candle was set on their table by a waiter, who assured them that the whole city was in the dark. An underground gas explosion had cut the main Edison conduit. Automobiles were trained to throw their lights through the front windows, but deeper down the candles were the only light in a wavering greenery of arbored bays like twinkling forest settings.

"Doesn't it seem strange now," said Andre, "that you were ever such chums with Lee?"

Stash's face, down bent, looked longer in the candle's fluttering—thinner, fined out.

"I don't know," he looked up smiling, "things always seem pretty good till you're past. Now the play's all done I begin to look at it coldly and wonder if it *will* be a *draw*. What is there, after all, that's good in it?"

"Good man!" Tallant exclaimed irascibly, "this gloom is getting you—you're growing introspective on us!"

IV

The candles were burning low, and they moved out into the crisp blue March night, where the sky held a new prominence, drifting in twinkling stars over a darkened city. The theatre crowds were passing in machines with hoary spars of light, or in laughing groups in search of some café not too dark for cheer.

Archie Fentree had brought home a party who had checked out at the Forrest Theatre; and the piano was opened, with candles which had long served as piano ornaments to light the music. The furniture bulked oddly; an old ceiling medallion flickered in fitful chiaroscuro. The lightless city furnished an off-night

magic, which seemed to give their gaiety an inspired folly:

“Be it then confessed:
Life is but a jest!—
Pass the time in laughter,
Love and song . . .”

“Let’s try it again!” said Archie’s brisk baritone, “and Matheson—take your voice down there on the Canadian side, so I can have Tressie by me. Come, Plazarski, sing up!”

“Be it then confessed. . . .”

But Andre’s aunt interrupted to tell her that a man had called to see her, and had promised to be back. . . . “No—no!—no one they knew, but a little man with a very odd name.”

In the midst of their gay recrimination the little man must have come up the dark street. . . . Andre sprang up from the piano. She felt before he passed the archway that it would be Varika, and rushed across the dimly lighted room to take his left hand. The other was in Stash’s grip.

“Sit down here,” said Andre, “till Aunt Blaine has a fire started in the back sitting-room.”

“How are they all, Varik?” Stash asked in a low earnest tone.

“Fine! fine!” The little man pressed down his fat triangular tie uneasily.

v

In the back sitting-room before the desultory blaze Andre spoke tremulously: “I thought you never, never left home—Mr. Varika.”

“Dat’s a trouble!” he burst out, his face flushing

above the turquoise-blue tie, "dat I like my home too much to go away—dat's a true thing. . . . Back at de ol' hostinets I was so mighty glad!"—there was an almost angry fervor in his voice—"dat I got satisfied for old Bohemia to be never free—so dat dere in de shade, wid a good pipe, it makes a nice thing to talk about! . . . How we goin' to some day give de *swoboda*¹ to de ol' country. . . . Oh, very nice!—but I get seedy on *swoboda* an' never know it! *I got seedy on swoboda*—dat's what!" The blue tie seemed to grow bluer as his face flushed redder. He laughed nervously, and twinkled round in his old fashion.

"Does Ban still play for you?" Stash broke the silence.

"Ban? Ban? Ban?—yes, yes, he plays at Palat's at de hostinets. But I don' go dere much. . . . I'll tell you—things are change so much——"

In an instant Andre's heart began to hammer.

"—Dey say Koban Lake goin' to be drained now—after I built my new place on it. . . . An' what a change it make to dat country!"—He appealed a bit wildly to them both.—"I hear dat's all wrong about a big town an' factories—*nothing, nothing!*—just a mudhole—an' a *mine* underneath—like dat! . . ." He tried to describe the desolation he saw, but broke down. . . . "And all of it your father did!"—he looked at Andre with glistening eyes. In a moment he had brushed them with his black overcoat sleeve, and went on: "I couldn' believe it dat he would trick us!" He sprang up, facing Andre, who had risen with heart pounding.

"What—what does Tom say?"

"He says nothing, but dat he will take up de fight

¹ Swoboda = Liberty.

for us if we want to. But I don't want to fight him—Mist' Fen!" said Varika hoarsely. "So I ask you—if dere is such a way to switch it off, you come back to tell him." He paused shortly, his hands trembling in agitation on the checkered cap he clutched. Stash stood behind him, a wondering frown knotting his forehead. The firelight flickered upon all three.

"If anything . . ." said Andre tremulously, "if it's the way you say . . . I'm afraid it's all settled. I couldn't do anything."

"I didn' know, I didn' know!" said Varika, as if pleading excuse for annoying her uselessly: "I thought maybe—if it wasn' too late—you could tell him how we feel for him to do it—better let *anybody* else dan him! . . . An' he would turn roun' swift!"—he switched about—"an' see how wrong it is!"—he threw out his hands as if before an opening dark cave in the corner. Then abruptly changed: "Well, I mus' say good-bye——" he twisted his mustache as if to assert himself manfully; though his eyes were still glistening: "I mus' say good-bye—an' sorry I bothered you."

"It didn't—you didn't!" said Andre—in a whisper almost; she took his hand and pressed it quickly. He saw her distress and threw back his head: "It's all de same!" he tried to laugh brusquely, "I have de idea about it all. . . . We all so fine satisfied—we got seedy about *swoboda*!" He smiled and turned to be led out. . . . "Such a nice lady, your aunt, make a fire—I wouldn' have require it, but thank you."

Andre led the way through the hall and saw both Varika and Stash out into the March night. Then turned back to the front sitting-room where the voices were ringing:

"I like the boys—
To me they're joys:
It's fun to make them think
Their stories you believe!
Look in their eyes—
With sweet surprise! . . ."

The debonair dithering of the piano tapered off in casual silver throbbing—as if it had caught the spirit of the free-lance night.

CHAPTER V

I

Stash watched the *Huron* stand out—and caught McCandlish's last wave . . . It was a handkerchief! He checked a little affectionate laugh. Mac's failing for flicking out a large white handkerchief to twirl in his hat as a heat exhaust—to fling in gestures—this had an intimate place in Stash's memory of the last two years.

He turned back toward the great white hotels sunning on the Mackinac bluffs. A little empty feeling went with him . . . and a wonder at the Scotsman's growing dependence on him. It was something intimate and strong between them that had little if any connection with the success of the Tallant and Plazarski play. That hadn't been a sufficient royalty maker to loom large. And even if he shouldn't succeed in the summer's intention he felt that Mac would still think of him in the same warm way—"the big lad."

He wondered if he could give as much as the Scotsman expected. A heavy feeling of having disappointed in that personal way reverberated back to last sum-

mer—when he and Fentree had been ill at ease, and something about the Varika place had reproached him as if he were connected with the Maddon-Marantle-Fentree scheme.

The hardest thing—the most bewildering—had been to meet Marika's terribly truthful gaze the last night when she had begged him: "And don't come to me because you are sad for me! Never that! But just if you love me a little."

"I do—I do!" he protested. "I'm only sad because I haven't stayed by it straight way through!" But she had bade him good-bye; and traveling north with life sick in his heart and a mournful gaze turned on dead raptures, he had wondered with a start if that melancholy had showed in his way with her.

The year hadn't proved unhappy, because it had kept him busy with the management of "Mr. Strix," and the light rôle he carried. But already as he climbed the sunny causeways to the hotel he felt the irksome dread of being left alone with his thoughts—a dread that had increased during the past year. He lounged through the day, and danced till the lights of small craft coursing the purple harbour cleared home, and the hotel deck like a lofty borne ship sailed on alone—deserted by laughing voices and storming music.

II

As he woke the next morning a sheer sweetness of some dream presence daunted his waking mind till he resolved it into the shape of Rose Maddon; and, dismissing it, started out with a determination to make a beginning on the first draft of the new play. Coming back for breakfast along the mint-scented beach, he

thought of her again; and entering the dining-hall of the hotel caught a sight of her as poignant as if she had stepped out of the blue and peach-blow of the morning sky. . . . The pink had left the sky when they stood out on the lofty veranda, but it was still a faint and windy azure.

"I thought it was 'our Mr. Plazarski,'" she said, "but someone's head kept cutting yours like a gibbous moon. . . . Not yours the moon one!" She discounted just in time the beginning twinkle of his eye.

"You must have seen the moon in big state if you came in last night."

"Oh—we did! It was just as large as the ocean moon; but the boat was more convenable—and the Lake—well, big and good enough! Like home! I was ready to come back even if Mr. Leverage's talk hadn't frightened us. It did a little. And he was righter than we thought."

"Is it going to amount to anything—this war business?"

Rose raised her dark eyebrows and shook her head dubiously. There was, if any change, something tired about the marquise face which added a little sadness to her startling blue eyes.

III

They left each other, and Stash tried vainly to work. He wondered how much she had been able to forget of that terrible past. He wondered, frowning, if he must continue to feel constraint in her company, and if it wouldn't be best to avoid it altogether.

His wonder was answered during the next week, for with each new meeting the constraint wore away. At

times, when the exhilarating fun of sharp windy runs in the cat-boat, or walks on the shore and wood paths, had stirred them deeply, they found an electric gaiety, snapping, sparkling, dangerous.

One windy bright afternoon she threw aside the book she had been reading in a sandy, sun-warmed cove, and drew near to glance with inquiring interest at his block-pad—where hatch-works were crazing the sheet under his tense hand.

"I can't read any more—the wind flips the pages—and sand gets in——"

Livid white clouds were lumbering swiftly overhead.

"And it's getting up squally," said Stash, throwing back his head, "and weather's thickening—and—that's the way I feel!—do you?" He smiled apology for his discouraged tone.

"Is it hard work?" she asked seriously.

"When you get on a dead center, and need sand——"

"Here's sand," said Rose, holding out a handful. . . . He caught her hand with his. He could have held both her fists in his one; it struck something ringing in him, with the same old note of endearing smallness. Abruptly he dropped it.

"Yes—it's hard—when the thing won't come—and I need Tallant. The blocking is easy—but after that——Jerry could sit on the local room table and spout dialogue. Maybe you could help."

"All right! . . . What are these?" pointing to the cross hatchings, "the tracks the murderer left?"

"No——" said Stash, scowling down at them, and running his hand through his squared-off tuft which the wind was wavering, "murders are beautiful, lovely props—you can get a running start from them, and *red*

or *scarlet* or *crimson* in your title. But this is merely romance. It's gypsy romance. Romany stuff. '*Romance XXXX*' was the name Tallant picked. The deuce with that title is that I print it at the top of the sheet and those X's run me right off into these shadings . . . and I've done nothing but waste time."

"I'll help you," said Rose firmly, and took his pencil; "you can save half that time if you"—she drew so close that her chin almost touched his shoulder—"if you'll draw your X's this way!"—She ended triumphantly—drawing four //// and crossing them with four others. "Now!" she said seriously, "that's so much quicker than drawing each separate X laboriously." She leaned back with an air of having rendered great service.

It was as if she offered him a sharp, sweet formula for conniving at romance.

"You are great at short cuts!" he laughed.

"Surely, I'm expert in those lines," she smiled back.

Something fixed and dark was questioning her from Stash's eyes, though his mouth still twisted in a merry, casual smile. She sprang up suddenly. In the twinkling of an eye Stash stood beside her. There was nothing overt in his motion, simply the old abrupt force that seemed so effortless and magic. A thrill of memory carried her back to the day at Cutler's Beach.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked, as they walked back through the woods.

"Cutler's Beach," she said. "I didn't know I was smiling. I was thinking how you pitched till the storm broke, and how white the ball looked—like a snowball—when it grew so dark."

"That must have been because that sand diamond

didn't nig up the ball—or a new one had been thrown in. Was that all that made you smile?"

"Something else—yes—awfully amusing—you'll see if I tell you."

"I'll remember that!" said Stash, walking with his head thrown back.

They mounted the boardwalk stages to the hotel, pausing to look back at the crisping cats-paws and gray storm world over the straits; pledging each other silently it seemed in the exciting draught of such a view and such an air.

A conscious exaltation, pathetically hopeful of itself, brought his dark eyes to hers with the laughing eagerness of an older brother to the young Stan Plazarski of Cutler's Beach.

CHAPTER VI

I

It was that night that Stash received word from Fentree urging him to come down as soon as he could. Certain developments bearing on his relation to the Walewski properties were referred to. But along with this was a vague suggestion of menace and desperate anxiety. Yet all apprehensions were unheard in the drum beat of exultation that filled his head. He did not know what he hoped, he did not care to set a limitation to it; he only knew that he must stay until Rose Maddon's sailing date.

At times, as the five remaining days sped by, Stash and Rose talked in gay furor, and gained at other times a silence that meant more. They fell into an

absent-minded nonchalance, a cavalier entente, in which they seemed to ignore each other, but were only more acutely conscious of each other and that they need only swing silently along looking at a world enhanced by that cavalier understanding.

So the last day came, with a farewell to the lofty hotel decks, to the sandy, roaring shores and woods of mint and evergreen fragrance.

II

Rose was leaving before her party. She stood with Stash by the stern rail as the *Georgian* boomed a mellow majesty of good-bye, and the white serried shore fell back on its floor of flashing azure.

They passed the morning under the canopy of the promenade deck. With a sense of exquisite power Stash found her evidently willing and eager to spend every moment with him. Several times he suggested that he go off and read or work. But each time she had countered his proposal, as if anxious to test her satisfaction in his continuous company.

As if he felt that she was trying him out, he assumed for perversity the cavalier entente, was silent for long minutes, gazing out across the blue dazzle in such a way that he could keep in the corner of his eye her lion tawny hair with its fiery gold glints above her dainty profile. . . .

Slowly her own gaze drifted obliquely his way, taking the reckless contours of his head which carried a certain savage nobility, the sharp, clean cut of the matted ear and the faintly glinting cheek. During the last two years she had seen so much insidious, handsome unwholesomeness that she saw with a shiver of

relief the wholesome, flushed warmth of Stash's face. . . . Why was it so flushed and vibrating? . . . And then she saw suddenly that he had become conscious of her side glance just as she became conscious of his. In a moment they were laughing together, and this laughter, so abrupt and thrilling, thrust them into a deeper region of feeling.

"You've got to tell me what you were laughing about that day!" Stash demanded aggressively.

"Not yet——" she denied, "to-night perhaps."

They watched an elf-like tern ranging far into the blue north as if carrying a plaintive message of farewell. It was a shimmering noon-day with dissolving immensities of blue building a North ever deeper.

III

Night came with a heavy western sky; dark bands of iron purple with sinister yellow flanges. The lake grew dark, and merged into the purple of the sky. There came a lingering flush of crimson that tinged faces and white bulkheads with pink like a fire's reflection. The throb of the engines seemed to come out on a fuller beat, drumming sternly on with the towering, while-galleried bulk, to escape the violet gloom and sinister shine of the northwestern sky.

Stash Plazarski and Rose Maddon came up from the shining white and ringing clatter of the dining saloon to the vague, lonely rustle of the deck and the last gorgeous, sad gloom of sky and water.

Far on the sun road—immeasurably shining—a strange, dark shape, like a black shard of their own ship lost in their scouring flight, loosed a far belling

290 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

lonely murmur. . . . And from the towered mass above them a grandiose thunder sloped out over the water—burnishing and destroying in one vibration the last shimmer of the sun-road. For that soon melted out.

It grew dark quickly, and the plash and shatter of the water alongside rose higher. A lonesome chill crept into Stash's heart, and he turned longingly to Rose's slight figure. Her hair shimmered in the cabin lights, but her face was turned out to the dark. The noise and clatter within and the murmur along the decks left them alone in a vibration of unknown feelings.

A voice passing by muttered something of "Detroit at half after ten." A sudden feeling of fatefulness in the ship's on-leaning came over him, as though back there in the sinister splendor of sunset they had passed a meridian, and down through the dark miles he would be drawing nearer and nearer the old life, to Fentree and the Varikas and to some mystery in which old Walewski and his family's dark history were meshed.

"Detroit at half after ten." He would separate from Rose at Detroit—where she was to visit the Morfs. Only a few hours more. To count, to think, to plan was useless. He only knew that there were but a few short hours with Rose. Chances of happiness, and the favors of illusive sweetness—the incredible sweetness of youth—were limited. He suddenly realized this more intensely than he ever had before, as he felt the steady surge of the lighted bulk leaning on through the dark—a harping castle of youthful melody and dancing.

IV

He didn't care to dance—and yet proposed it to Rose. The feeling that it might be their last night together made him cling to every moment of fragrant sweet isolation with her.

Yet they moved in to the green-carpeted gallery—and on with hushed steps—looking down on the colored winging dancers a few moments before joining them. . . . When they came up once more and out on the gallery deck, he asked her to tell him at last why she had smiled that day on the beach.

She hesitated a little and began in a low voice: "It doesn't seem anything to smile at now. Perhaps a little. You mustn't misunderstand me, Stash—I was a selfish little girl then—just as I'm a selfish big one now."

"It's not on the proofs," said Stash; he clutched the stanchion with a hot hand.

"Well, then—that day at Cutler's Beach I was envious of Marika Varika that she could stay that evening with the hero of the day—you know you were!—you stood with her in that rustic pavilion—and it was such a childish, secret jealousy that I didn't know I felt it till—afterward."

"What's selfish about that?" Stash muttered. "You didn't show it." He tried to keep the jarring of his heart from out of his voice.

"Of course not, I was too proud. It would have been foolish to show it—and not pretty." Her voice fluttered as she went on: "It was the pretty aspect I was in love with, I know. . . . Little Rose Maddon

from the Castle—I pictured myself!—holding out her hand!—central figure in everything——”

“Don’t say anything,” Stash muttered angrily, “to spoil *my* picture of that little girl!”

“Wait till I finish. . . . Holding out her hand to big Stan Plazarski, *the Polak boy!*” She laughed a little, with a chime as though crying. “I’d always thought of the Polaks as cruel and rough and terrible. . . . Don’t you see!—when I saw that big smiling one—with his big, gay, twinkling air—I added all the terrible I’d heard about the Polaks to make a mystery about you! From all I’d heard I didn’t imagine one of them could be good looking. It was a shock—a teasing one—I said: ‘Oh, I never saw such a pretty Polak boy!’ . . . Do you remember—that day in the Wabash Valley yards?”

“When you stood in the black *spot!*” Stash whispered.

“But you didn’t see through my mocking words to my little trembling shock—as if a gipsy tale about me had come true! You made a face, and stood smiling—the merriest boy’s face!—You would have sprung up into that stack if I’d said the word. Ten feet! I knew you could then. . . . It began that noon. . . . And when you came that night to the castle, I felt like a little girl in a frightening dream—it was so terribly what I *wanted* to happen! The minute you came I knew—I knew it had gone on!—like dreams most never do. I was trembling so that all I could do was to—do what you said! When you told me laughing about your father—it was just the terror I knew would be there. . . . If I could go back to that valentine Rose Maddon that I saw myself and that *you pictured* that night!—with a tiny pink star glittering over my

head . . .” She laughed again with the chime that sounded somehow grief-stricken.

The splash and swish of unseen waves came up to them.

“You haven’t spoiled that little girl a bit,” Stash murmured hoarsely, “but just given her back!” He took one of her hands in his: “Just let me—without seeing you—think I’m holding her hand, and we’re back in that night.”

“But we aren’t!”—she laughed with the little chime, —“and all this sliding on—sliding—shows we aren’t. . . . I’m more selfish than I was then . . . I still make pictures of myself—and *some of them I’m afraid of*. . . . I’m still in love with the pretty side—and when anything comes across to jar it, I’m hurt!—I’m raging inside! . . . So don’t count on me, because I never know when some horrible picture may form itself around me . . . like that night . . . when your brother . . . broke into the theatre . . .” She stopped as if she could go no further. . . . “When some other terrible picture may set me crying inside—as if my pride had been crushed—and stamped on!”

He saw now, and felt in the trembling of her hand, how she had felt that night at the old Alhambra.

“You see now how I am. . . . It’s only in this last week that I’ve been able . . . Just because I’ve been able to go back so far and forget the in-between—that’s no reason to think that I won’t go on figuring myself like little Rose Maddon did, don’t you see, don’t you see!—And that’s the reason I *smiled*!—because if I hadn’t smiled and laughed I’d have felt like crying for my used-to-be self . . . and . . . you.”

Something was beating in Stash’s throat and thundering in his ears, like the warning of the passing of

an incredible, sweet illusion. His voice caught—he gave up words—and merely raised her hand to where his heart was thumping . . . to let it speak for him . . . looking down in the dim light with black questioning eyes.

“Don’t trust me,” she whispered, “don’t count on me, Stash. . . . I couldn’t, couldn’t stand it again—it would sicken the picture forever. . . . Figure to yourself,” she laughed tremulously, “how I’m always figuring myself to *me!* . . .” And pulled away her hand. She stood hesitating—and while she was hesitating, murmuring that she was going in—Stash felt at last—knew in his heart—that it had been a dream, this last week—that its peak was passed—and every plunging mile southward through the watery blackness would carry him farther and farther away from that meridian.

And yet before he left his dark post above the plashing water he had raised a new hope: an illusion built of illusions—and more achingly sweet because the unbounded, illimitable faith of youth was missing—melted somewhere behind, unseen, like the shattering, rustling wake the *Georgian* tossed backward into the blackness.

V

The next morning Stash woke to the throb of the engines; and looking out of the port he saw the restless light blue dazzle of St. Clair. Lavender landfalls crept out of the misty shimmer to the south—and the shining avenue of the Straits leading down to Detroit. Memories of Sunday trips with his mother and Cardoul shimmered in the sad brightness of a vanished time.

As they drew near the city, Rose Maddon came out, and, smiling through an azure barrier of expectancy, joined him by the rail. Big red reveres rose about her chin, and the stormy gray-blue coat fluttered and caught against Stash's arm. They watched silently as the city forged out in stately grimness on umber transit sheds and dark piling.

In the abrupt gloom of the shed—after the sun-scarred blue of the river—the crowding faces showed obscure. But in a moment Stash had seen Andre and her father. Charlotte and Ced Morf stood just behind them. There was a rush of greeting:

"I'll see your father, Rose, before you," said Fentree in his quick, nervous way.

"Tell him then to give you a vacation," said Rose with a flash of smiling sympathy.

That was Stash's last glimpse of her: an inestimable flash of gray and red reveres, with golden sand glints and precious blue below the high rolled hat. . . . Red roses to snow cooled wine, sharp tingling. A sudden blanched hush of mind brought him the thunder of the boat, throbbing still in his ears like time made audible. . . . She was gone.

BOOK NINE: THE SPLENDID ENTERPRISE AT LAST

CHAPTER I

I

Stash and Fentree took the night train south. His great chance had come at last. His most extravagant hopes flared up under the hypnosis of the lawyer's febrile talk. The assurance that he might recover the fortune which had been potential in Bolish Plazarski's Detroit holdings—converted into a great property by Walewski's shrewd dealings and the city's magic growth—threw a strange, unsteady light of promise over his dream of Rose Maddon.

In that light he fancied such a precious dainty one might be able to figure herself in a brilliant enough setting! Ah, would she! Would she be able to figure herself as *his*! His! Ah, little Rose from the Castle—what a finish to all that gipsy dream that had seemed too exciting for a young girl's mind to hold! . . . The big smiling boy out of the dark . . . come back to overset all the wrong and tragedy that the figure of old Walewski stood for. Old Whaleback Walewski of the new *Walewski Line*.

He walked out into the dark of the train vestibule to try to think more clearly. He had not yet given Fen-

tree a definite answer. A strain of coolness streaked the air: they were nearing the foot of Lake Michigan. Against the star-crumbled sky the dunes rolled dim and snowy. The sonorous belling of a steamer told of Michigan plashing dark and tireless just over the ridge. He clutched with hot hands the cooling brass-work. It seemed stupendous to think of a concession that would make him part owner of a lake line—like the Ruffross or Chandos boats. But nothing less than this was in Fentree's plans for forcing Walewski's hand.

The lawyer told him of the three new boats added to Walewski's line. Stash had heard of the *Casimir II* and *John S. Walewski*, named for two boats of the old whaleback line. It was Walewski's responsibility in the Koban Mine disaster that had roused Fentree to probe the old man's past and make use of Jan's affidavits. For Walewski had demanded to be taken in on the mine organization when he turned over the essential strip in Koban Hotel Estate to the company that drained the lake. And it had been his mischievous work in the purchasing department which had led indirectly to the *mine blast*. Stash fantastically pictured the reddish drumming eyes of the man looking in out of the night—even smiling dryly at the unstrung Fentree, with his buried horror and anger over that disaster. Stash clenched his hands, his heart pounded. He saw all that he might do with the power that would be his in time; his fancy ranged all the Lakes. It was like the visions of all the past recoiling upon him, and launching him at last into the greatest enterprise of all! Something real, real, real!—different from the unsatisfying dream life of the stage! Now at last he confronted the splendid reality.

The Junction fell behind. The switch-tower ruby light dwindled in the ashen dune-side. A caboose "fatigue" lamp, like the cool blue crystal of dreams, twinkled and was gone. They were definitely forging southward, and Durand would soon be sending out dreary glimmers of shanty lights or watchman's lanterns.

Stash went back into the car with a resolution formed—to cast everything into the lawyer's scheme. In the theatrical, unreal lake junction with its ruby towerman's light gleaming like wine in the snowy dune-side, he had drunk deep of the cool lake air and the magic of dreams drifting far to new worlds that would transfigure him for her dissatisfied and wistful eyes! . . .

II

Fentree's head, with its glistening, silver filings among the iron gray, seemed bent in sleep; but when Stash got nearer, the lawyer lifted his watchful eyes and smiled questioningly.

"I'll go in!" Stash nodded. A thrill of eagerness to be working with old Fen after all the years warmed his heart.

"Good!" Fentree spoke briskly. "Let's go right down to the office when we get in. It'll be our best time for looking over everything alone."

Lights began to flick past; dreary, empty squares and dark meadows; then brick walls; and they rolled with sullen, hollow thunder into the train shed.

As they stepped into the kennelly darkness of the short street leading to Shabbona, Stash raised his hand to settle his cap in a gesture that was like a defiance to

the dour dinginess of the station and the town. It had always punished him.

III

The first dawn light was graying the windows of the old cupolaed lavender house when Fentree led Stash into the echoing big room which he had re-fitted for his office. The drop-light's dismal radiance showed the small safe, the letter files, the white painted mantel with the charcoal remnants of last winter's fire. Before opening the safe Fentree drew back the front door and stood listening. The maples were shaking softly with the dawn breeze.

As Fentree knelt before the old Fairbanks, Stash noted the thin drag of his trousers against his ankles. The safe door bore an old-fashioned decoration of apple blossoms and blue chicory above a rustic lake strand. Stash remembered the time when it had seemed richly beautiful to him, when he had fully believed it a picture of Koban Lake.

The papers were soon spread under the drop-light. Fentree had taken the trouble to discover the whereabouts of the witnesses to Bolish and Jan Plazarski's affidavits. Before it grew light outside they had looked through the letters that Walewski had written Bolish, and others bearing on the transfer of the Detroit property to Walewski by trust deed. Before they were through, the fraudulent contrivance of Walewski seemed as clear to Stash as it was to Fentree.

The lawyer's thin jaw was set as he locked the safe and showed Stash the combination he was using: "Memorize it; you'd better; if anything should happen to me——" His eyes looked startlingly large in

their gloomy sockets. They had a mesmeric effect on Stash, making him feel as if he were working here at some obscure evil game. But one thought of Walewski's high-boned face was enough to make him clamp his jaw. He hated with a savage, dull ache the man who had brought ruin on Bolish and Marynia Plazarski, and Varsh—now lost from sight—on *all of them*.

CHAPTER II

I

Even before the arranged interview with Walewski, Stash went out to live at the mine boarding-house and join young Heriot's rescue crew which was organizing for the reopening of the mine. Kucin was on the crew, and his buddy Ban had blandly demanded to be taken on with him.

In the meantime there were jolly evenings at Vari-ka's, for it was only a two-mile walk from the mining town to the sycamore grove. But the dark lake shore was missing, and to Stash it was not the same. For one thing, Marika had changed.

They had crossed hands impulsively the first night, as if they could renew old days at once. And her wrists had trembled so thin across his big ones that he had felt almost a shock of fear. She was hardly less gay, and taught clumsy boys in the Wacaser Neighborhood House the *dumka*, just as she danced it under the sycamores with Anetka. But she was no longer his Rika girl. She was older, a woman. Perhaps that was why he felt repulsed—and resentful—and bitterly tender.

He turned to Anetka at night, when the lights were dim, under the sycamores, and tried for a teasing moment to imagine her the little Marika. It half comforted. She would snuggle up in her fresh, fragrant evening dress. Ban would fiddle in swift zigzags of Czigane melody. But her very air of throwing her arms across his knee and twisting out to look up in his face was so much that of a little sister toward a much older big brother. . . . He saw that he had changed. He wondered then if he had aged so much in the past three years. He saw now that he had been far from happy during that time. A strange, wrenching disappointment would seize him, as though he could by some convulsive effort bring back the old times.

In the meantime he heard nothing from Rose Mad-don. Perhaps she had been staging a pretty picture of herself in that compassionate yielding on the *Georgian*. But no—no! . . . it had been too heart-racking. And yet how far off and unreal she seemed from this world of hot prairie nights with their sooty, tragic oppression of the mines.

At times the drill with the crew seemed stifling, useless and depressing; but it helped to smother the restlessness and wonder about the prospect which had seemed but half a week ago like a vision down the blue radiant avenues of a seer's crystal.

II

The reddening sun slanted on the green watering tank at the foot of Varika's lane. The Polish boy, Kola Brezki, had just brought up Marika's horse, *Podvodnik*. She ruffled its nostrils and laughed at its

pretended fright: "Ho—look at the stove polish on his nose!"

Catfish and perch circled through the water. "And see his whiskers, Stash—isn't he just a catfish for whiskers—then pretends he's afraid of them! Feel that stove-polished velvet on his nose! Isn't he a podvodnik!"

The boy Kola reached up laughingly to feel the nose. Back of him his tall brother Stan stood smiling at Marika. They both worshipped her as if she were Our Bright Lady of Chenstokowa. Their lunch pails were on their arms to-night, for the mine was going to open at last.

Stash, of course, was on his way, too. He held Marika's bridle on one side, and Kola on the other, while together the four friends crossed the burnished flats towards the purplish huddle of the mining town on the far northwest ramp of what had been Koban Lake.

III

"I wish they weren't going down to-night!" Marika exclaimed, as they saw Kola and Stan off to their work on the night shift.

"Glasson and old Heriot say it's all right!" Stash threw out his hand.

"But old miners are like old soldiers," said Marika, "they don't talk about danger. . . . Isn't Stan like a big brother dog—you know dogs with a noble face—like that! I like to hear him say—'Mucha glad morning!'"

She looked off at the red, western sky. Stash felt in her a mystery that puzzled and excited him. It was as if she were beautifully and wonderfully in love with

someone. He felt aggrieved that she could look into the lustrous twilight as if she saw there some magic beyond his dreaming. She—it seemed—having passed his boyish love by, had come on some glory of expectancy. . . . Of whom?—Of what? . . .

She turned the black horse on the dust-parched ramp. Stash stood in his grimy whipcords, immovable. As he saw her white forehead lifted against the marine blue of the dusking sky he saw that he had made an incredible mistake—that she had not lost her pretty looks as he had thought—that she was not only pretty, but wonderfully beautiful. . . . With the piercing, flying beauty of a loved figure dwindling on a darkening plain. . . . Like harsh music that melts to a chording beauty far in the night. . . .

Smiling back over her shoulder she waved her hand to him. So she galloped off, over the red-burnished flat, as Stash watched wonderingly: the night blue dusking first her hair like the blue-black of Ban's violin, and then fairly obscuring her as she followed the far, bending rim of the old lake.

CHAPTER III

I

Stash passed down through the sour-smelling streets, and found Fentree arrived and talking with Doran, the great hook-faced, stooping engineer. Meeting young Heriot at the gates he walked on with him towards the lighted power-house. The coal dust had begun to ride away through the gaunt tippie tower—high—like a pillar of dusky fire, turning the night

above it a florid purple. After two vain efforts to reopen the mine the third assault was on.

In the hoisting-house Doran had taken his place at his lever, answering with infinite precision to the clangor of the signal bell. In the sickly, lilac-green drizzle of the nitrogen lamp Stash caught a glimpse of Stan Brezki, his high arched head lit in a wan splendor. The boy looked like a shepherd king.

Up out of the vault sifted the darkness of the *cage*, like the top of a crude catafalque. The foremost men lunged aboard the lower deck; the cage dropped to the second deck level.

"I think I'll go down," Stash nodded to Heriot, "if you don't mind."

"Good thing," said Heriot laconically.

The car shuddered and nestled in downy black. It was like plumbing the hold of an inconceivably great ship, with a menace of far-off fires lately drawn. . . . Down . . . down. / . . Miles away a bell twanged with a harp note—the cage struck the sump water with a silky slap, and a little "hunky" in the third deck gave a silly purr of pleasure in the sensation.

Here in the huge lighted scale-room there was a humming of arc lights and wires and of wind in the air courses. Stash spoke briefly to old Heriot, telling him that Bob had sent him down. The old man nodded and turned right back to the unlading of timbers from the freight hoist. "Bear away to the left—thot gert stick first!"

Stash moved on to where Glasson and his crew were testing with pit lamps held cautiously to the entry ceiling for the white or fire damp. Suddenly a bright flame dropped with a blare to their heads! Stash crouched. The alarm passed. They moved on; while

all round, like a forest sounding its trees, the glum body of the mine lay entrenched in secrecy.

Stash turned to go back; and a strange feeling that the mine was watching him at every corner, whispering that his fate was bound up in it, followed him on. He came up with a feeling of stupor and surprise into the open air world, where voices and laughter sounded clattering and loose. He hurried down through the hot stillness of the summer night and found Fentree with the Superintendent by the *Balkan Restaurant*. The lawyer looked tired, but his eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"You've been down? Good. . . . Who?—Glasson?—Depend on him!"

"Why don't you go home now?" Stash urged.

Fentree brushed it aside:

"Glasson told me the difference in the new canvas weight was enough to swing things. Of course a real blast. . . . But then!—the heavier brattice is going to keep the gas from seeping. That's the gain."

"Why don't you go home?" Stash interrupted, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Maybe I'd better," said Fentree. . . . "What did Royd say about the checking? . . ." He turned sharply to listen to a loud Slovak voice—"Well, we don' car'-a-damn now! If dat place go to hell now, we say to him, '*All right!* go along den! I guess we give you long enough to behave!'"

Fentree gave a tired smile and snapped his thumb nervously: "If we could only call it a day!—like that! . . . Well, to-night's Walewski's last. . . . We ought to know to-morrow." He frowned; then excitedly: "We'll bring the fantails down here by canal—they'll bark right under the tipples!" He smiled exultantly

and patted Stash's shoulder. He had stepped into his car when a whistle peeled wild and lonely over the night flats. A second soaring scream . . . a third . . . and the whistle was storming the night with unremitting cries.

An explosion underground! . . . Back of the thrudding feet, the maddening shouts, came the women giving cry. Stash was amazed by the bell-like calmness of the night universe with its softly twinkling stars. A feeling of terrible irony was sickening his lungs as he ran.

He caught up with a gaunt-faced Pole running with gulps of crying laughter: "*Oh, nie! nie!*" . . . "No! no!" Stash's heart echoed.

II

A crowd walled up the mouth of the mine: the lilac-green lamp splashed wriggling shapes on them. A gray, terrible smoke staggered up the hoist.

In the warehouse three men were already in rescue suits. The ugly head of the cage drifted up, and they were pushed on.

"Are you ready?" called Doran.

"Ready!" came the signal.

Doran's fingers curved. . . . The cage sagged with a moan of the brakes. . . . A sigh swept the crowd; and the gray, gaunt figure of smoke writhed and aired its livid graces before them. Gradually the smoke thinned: the mine was beginning to breathe in. If fire was lurking in the depths a "repeat" might clap the rescue men against the walls like morsels of wine-soaked bread. The women crouched and rocked a little together.

The first motor car lights were seen streaming across the flats from Durand, when the bell jangled in the hoisting house and everyone turned to the silhouette of Doran blocked against the indigo window. His arm slid forward. . . . Something was swimming up the hoist . . . something.

The three iron-bulbed heads of the rescue men swelled up under the rude canopy of the cage. But it was what they carried that called all eyes. It broke from them snapping like a fish; burst its way into the shrieking crowd and made an anguished salaam. A motor searchlight caught his gaping mouth like a bright-red plug in a rocking negroid face. Several women were laughing at him in uncontrollable hysterics. He hung out his hands as if they were dripping scalding tears of a terrible dissolution. In despair at finding no position of relief he salaamed again—beautifully. Hartranft and Kucin led him away. . . . Stash heard somebody recognize the man in a frightened tone: "It's Laughing Jesus!" He remembered that nickname—and the man: a bearded fellow with mournful, grinning face and black eyes that followed one uncannily. He caught a roar from the man's mouth as he passed, and felt as if he had caught the very breath and fever of the thing.

Drawn by some horrifying apprehension, he followed them to the warehouse door. Heriot's voice shouted for Kucin, and the slight, bronze-dark veteran of the Balkan War sprang up the steps. Stash saw the foolish, moon-faced Ban clinging to his *bradder's* hand, begging him not to go down—staring as though he saw him already a hundred thousand miles away. . . . The helmet closed over the scorched, hard cheeks and Kucin was gone.

III

They brought up nothing but dead pedlar's bundles. . . . Suddenly . . . it was Fentree who was begging someone not to go. . . . A new, strange picture formed before Stash—he looked through the window of his iron bubble at a far-off, frantic Fentree. It seemed a foolish thing—and yet he pitied him; gave him a hard squeeze of the hand, and was gone.

The three sea monsters stumbled down the steps. . . . Somewhere as if far off through the night sounded a faint *boom-doom!* . . . A singing swoop of air came bursting through the hoist mouth. . . . Lights pitched . . . voices roared . . . frantic cries of "Glasson!"—"Doran! . . ." The Cornishman gave the word to hoist. . . . The cage floated up—one—two—three empty decks. . . . And Kucin's rescue team? . . .

Stash stumbled onto the lower deck. Down they pitched through the white gloom—till the sump took them with a splash. . . . A pall of smoke that rumbled to their push like cobwebs spread across their view. Before them seemed a tundra—or a sweep of mystic marsh country. A stillness filled the entry, like the bland dumbness in the galleries of a dead man's brain.

Their searchlights made play through the mist. . . . Out of the darkness ahead came a man—laughing—tossing his arms as if he had discovered an underground ocean and gone mad with the mournful grandeur of it. . . . *He was walking backwards!* And yet—his knees worked forwards—surely he was facing them . . . but there were as certainly no features there. He fell at their feet.

Heriot shouldered the body and stumbled back. . . .

Suddenly Stash's light caught out a figure kneeling in some frantic, fearful rite. It leapt like a frightened rabbit to avoid those three monsters. Stash sprang after and pitched headlong on him—thinking, too late, of the terror he had made for the spongy creature. His hands were wet with him. He shouldered the thing and plodded back, resigned to the stupefying horror of it.

IV

The crowd above waited in a terrible patience. The signal clanged. Doran's hand moved through the stars at his window. His face was set like horn or stone as he started the ponderous thunder of the drums. Into the cloying lilac wash rose the cage.

Two of the rescue crew that had been caught in the after-blast were laid on the ground and helmets removed. In the motor's headlight the hawkish bronze features of Kucin stared out—beautifully eagle-like, and dark with a look of night. . . . Fentree's tortured, weeping face was over him. Ban was called. And all that the poor, stupid fellow could do was to crouch there and cry into his kunio hat. They led him away—making a shrill, foreign jabber—for he couldn't leave off crooning: "My falcon!—my bright falcon!"

Stash sat bewildered where he had taken off his rescue suit in the warehouse. . . . The thing went on . . . on. . . . Later he went down again, between blasts. Now and again he saw Marika's flushed face, saw her helping among the women. They laid out Kucin, wrapping him in brattice canvas. All at once it struck Stash that Kucin was gone . . . a million million miles away! He hadn't realized it. Kucin,

who had guarded the old Alhambra, who had begged him to ask Marika to sing.

The night seemed unending. Bundle after bundle of shoddy rags and blood was brought up to the surface. As one of these was brought into the flare Stash gave a start; he called hoarsely: "Bring Kola Brezki!" The high-arched head of Stan was blackened and crushed, but the face still held a sleeping nobility. Young Kola looked at it unbelievably, and tried to bristle against such a fraud. This wasn't Stanish! He looked again. His breath stopped as if his throat had been locked. He stared about—mouthing his anguish without words. . . . There was no tall living Stan . . . just this thing of twisted rags and bursted silent head. With a whimpering call he crouched down and began to smooth it.

Slowly the mine buildings raised into the dawn. With straw and canvas bundles around there was the appearance of a circus grounds just before the big tent goes up. People in fact were coming from Durand to see it. Machines were stretching behind ghostly booms of light across the gray dawn fields.

The hoist still floated up and down, and each time came new fragments. Doran's hand no longer moved through the stars. The sky behind his humped shoulders was magic lantern blue. Morning had come.

CHAPTER IV

I

So far as Stash was concerned he had given up everything Fentree's plans implied; but he was shocked

and bewildered when Fentree drew him into the humid silence of the office one hot afternoon and told him that after the policy on the mine's resumption had been decided they would drive through the coercion of Walewski. Stash protested that he had given up all that; wanted only to help Fentree readjust things and get back to McCandlish.

"No, no!" Fentree's eyes blazed fanatically. "Don't you see that's just what he's counting on? That we'll be broken by this! Of course not!—don't you see how absurd! If we were right then, we're right now! More necessary. . . . If we give up . . ." His hand jerked out with the nervous abandon of a man who recoils from the unnameable dread of owning himself crushed and defeated.

And when finally Maddon-Marantle's decision to abandon the mine hurled him against the wall, he stiffened there with fierce fatalism and took over other legal affairs of theirs with a spirit of grim concentration. Nonetheless he wrote Walewski steadily, seeking an appointment. But the old man had left for Detroit, and nothing was heard of the matter until the night of the Slavonic Bazaar to raise funds for the mine sufferers.

II

It promised a hot starry night like those of the last week, and Stash went out to Varikas' to ride in with Marika to the Bazaar. They took the turn by the tamaracks and passed down by the old hostinets. Stash gave one backward, lingering look at the shadowy alders; and turned his gaze abruptly to the dun plain of the old lake bottoms, where the gray huddle of the deserted mining village was fading into veils of mist.

. . . He thought of how Marika had gone to the village again and again, of how he had seen her stroking the arm of a grief-crazed Slovak woman whose two boys had been crushed. He couldn't see how she could throw herself into that dreary atmosphere with such passionate eagerness, as if to sate her own heart-ache in its desolation. He himself was longing hungrily, feverishly, after these five weeks of helping Fentree, to get back to Detroit.—Anything to escape the futility that was hanging over his life.

"Are you going on with this?" He turned to her abruptly, startling the sorrel mare Varika had loaned him: "I mean staying at Miss Thurman's House, and—working with those people—trying to help what you can't change in a hundred years? . . . See—your father is afraid to have you ride out from town—at night. . . . There's something in the papers every week—a shooting or something." They were clattering into the first brick-paved street, which the humid smelly dusk scarcely softened. He frowned till his forehead bulged pink in the slanting florid sunset. "*It's a man-killer town!*" he hoarsed. "*That's all!*"

He knew that it had punished him again.

"You don't understand," Marika murmured harshly, but with the harshness of repressed emotion. "It isn't all dark—like the mine trouble. But even if it is, the time comes when you will not see such a thing as happiness away from them. When it's just like you defy the trouble—and you go on—you rush on, with, oh—like with a shout of joy! Try to see, Stash! It's not like you would be going into the dark hating it—but as if you knew that beyond the dark . . . Oh, Stash, what if beyond the dark there is something *so beautiful* . . . that all the dark . . . is a thing to go through

with just—yes, *with just a shout of joy!*” She had felt her way along, and finished with a gaze of eagerness, as if begging him to see.

He looked at her fiercely, trying to see! . . . and he saw her flying fast like a loved figure dwindling on a lonely plain.

“But we won’t talk about all that,” Marika slapped her dust coat with her whip sharply; “and I’ll promise you a great sight in Papa’s tableau.”

III

They stopped at the Park house and learned that Andre was over at the office with her father. Then at the old Shieling place, where Stash tied the horses at the edge of the great dim lawn. Dance music was pouring out of the new hall of the Wacaser Neighborhood House across the alley from Fentree’s offices. Joining the straggling crowd passing through the rooms of the old brick mansion they approached Varika slyly where he sat with Karshenko in a pompous tableau.

They puffed in solemn silence at their scenic painted porcelain pipes, deigning no answer to Stash’s questions.

“There they sit like wax flowers,” Marika laughed, “but just as soon as we get away they will begin talking the war.”

They crossed over to Fentree’s office to see Andre; she took them up the stairway and out on the upper gallery. There they could sit on the railing and watch the lively flow of light dresses, costumes and dark figures below, and listen to the music. From the dusky region of Shieling’s lawn they heard a sharp whinnying.

"Podvodnik!" Marika laughed. "He got himself nipped, I believe!"

Andre went down to her father at length, leaving the other two alone.

"Do you remember the night you taught me the stunt out here?" Marika murmured.

Stash remembered: "And you were right in for it. You were gayer then."

Marika was silent a moment: "I knew you were disappointed, Stash. I mean when you came this summer. . . . Two years ago, too. It seems to me . . . well, you are different, too."

"Then you were disappointed in me!"

"No—no!" She caught her breath, as if she had been too eager in denial.

"I wasn't disappointed, Rika, I wasn't. . . . Except in myself. It's always been this way, that I could never stand true to things—like you can. Always I'm wanting something new to come up . . . something more splendid than ever before! So that I could lead it!—So that I could picture myself . . . like Rose Maddon says. Anything that looks tiresome to me, like sticking to something I once knew—like their old swoboda over here!—I can't see, I can't fire myself at! Why is it, Rika, why? . . . I couldn't, I couldn't go through the dark, like you say."

"*Yes, you did once, Stash, yes, you did!*" Her voice quivered with her effort to thrust her faith in him into his own heart.

"But that . . ." Stash's voice ground angrily, "but that I failed in! . . . I went to Buffalo once . . . and to Toledo. . . . But I ought to've gone again . . . and again. . . . I gave up finding her. . . . Oh, Rika, I don't stick by things. . . . Or the people I love most!"

316 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

Always something splendid or wonderful I must have . . . or I'm no good."

"But you did once, Stash, and you will again . . . till it grows . . . till you see the wonderful in just that!"

He saw the flash of dim lamplight in her eyes . . . and it was as if he caught a flickering glimpse of stars shining deep in a glorious darkness.

After a silence he spoke again: "If you only knew, Rika, knew why I came down here . . . *what you'd think of me!* To make old Whaleback give up what he stole from my family. . . . It's gone to great money, Rika. . . . Detroit land! . . . And ships! . . . He's got a good start again. . . . And the coal mine . . . I was going to have interests in that, that was crooked from the start. But I didn't care—because that's the thing that gets me: *money—glory—the lakes!* . . . and . . . *a Princess.* . . . I've been a fool, Rika . . . *I wanted to climb into glory!* And now I've sort of lost heart. . . . The papers are there in Fen's safe . . . to gouge it out of him—the old man. . . . I could take it up and go on! I could have it all maybe! *Sometimes I'm mad to do it even now* . . . to leave all that I know I ought to like behind . . . to smash it down and go on. . . . *I could do it!* . . . But something, now, holds me back. . . . I don't know if it was that night of the mine blast . . . or . . . or what."

"It's because you *do stand true, Stash!*" her voice was leaping, crying softly, "*because you do stand true!*"

"*Do I?*" he begged her eagerly, uncertainly.

"You do—you will!—because that's the finest of all there is—that's the most splendid!"

Again he caught the gleam in her eyes—of stars beyond a glorious dark.

IV

Andre joined them, and, passing downstairs, they looked in at Fentree bending over his desk. "Can't we get him to stop awhile," Andre's voice whispered anxiously in Stash's ear, "and get him out of this house?—It's bad for him."

Fentree looked up sharply, and came out to Stash. He took him into the room whose dingy white enamel had seen the organization of the Koban Industrial Company, and led him over by one of the French windows. Stash noted the perspiration in the lawyer's hollowed temples. He was never to forget this moment: its saddening feeling of what-might-have-been, trailing the echoes of Marika's voice into the Tatra gipsy song now swinging from the cembalon and violins next door.

"Have you seen Rose Maddon?" Fentree asked abruptly.

"No!" said Stash with a start. It was as if a fragrant scarf had slanted suddenly across his face . . . that name.

"Perhaps she just got here. She stopped me—going over the ridge. She said something had got on her nerves . . . she was afraid all the time. About her father—and us too. Yes, she had heard my name and yours connected in some threat. Where?—I don't know!—they're floating around. Just as I told her, it'll be easier to handle the roughs after the crowd's got back to work. It'll clear up. She asked me if I had heard of a man called 'Laughing Jesus.' "

"I know!" Stash winced, "he got smashed—crushed in a fall—trying to save Stan Brezki . . . that night."

"Yes," said Fentree, "he must have gone to the Marantle hospital. He and a fellow named Drumgoole are running a gang. She looked hurried and frightened when she mentioned his name. I've got to thinking since, maybe she wants to see you. She said she'd be——"

"It can't be of any account," said Stash hurriedly, the blood ringing in his ears. He saw that Andre and Marika had come back to the door for him. They were ready to go across to hear Vladika's speech.

v

The hall next door was full, and there seemed to be a vague disorder that the sturdy Czech's thundering speech could hardly account for. Turbulent groups in the back of the big room seemed restlessly coming and going.

There was a tumultuous talking on the stairway when the speech was over. Suddenly a more powerful voice than any—belonging to a young Czech who wore his tableau costume—shouted "*Hej Slavani! Swoboda!*"

Stash looked back to see an unconscious tableau of portentous Slav figures—a little cluster of Czech and Polish boys who had sworn to go back for the fight and for *Swoboda!* The wild cymbals and violins were crashing into "Poland Shall Not Die."

Marika had lost sight of Andre; so she and Stash crossed to the old house again. Fentree's light was still burning. The rear rooms were dark. But Marika

whistled, calling: "Andre—Andre! . . . I thought I heard someone there," she murmured.

They turned back to Fentree's office. . . . A low rumbling uproar burst behind them. . . . They were swept into the lighted room. Fentree started up in dazed protest, his chair clattering behind him. A black muffled man with a brown beard sprang for the chair and whirled it aloft. Stash saw that it was the man *Laughing Jesus*. Drumgoole, with his turtle face of tired depravity, slid across the room and pulled the shade. It was all strangely, horribly silent.

Stash hurled himself from left to right, his breath whistling between his teeth. He felt that two men were holding him; he could see the man who held Marika—a big horse-faced man. Marika's face was white, with dartling red spots. Her eyes flashed wildly to the man *Laughing Jesus*, who brought the chair down over Fentree's head in such a way that the legs pinned his shoulders. He sank to the floor groaning. The bearded man tied his own black handkerchief around his mouth, and swung him to the men in the hall.

"Now!"—he whirled to Stash with the chair in his hands—"Let him go!—I say!"

The two men relaxed their hold . . . and Stash sprang for *Laughing Jesus*. . . . The cry choked in Marika's throat. . . .

The brown-bearded man had met him with a crashing blow over the head. Stash broke it with one arm; but the fall against the fireplace fender seemed unending—a reeling gulf of blackness; and when the room came back in jagged flashes and he tried to shout, he felt that only half of him was left, that he was strug-

gling with the fragments of himself, from which his arm and neck and half his head were missing.

He heard plainly: "Now open dat safe!—don' you want some more? . . . Dat safe!" The man's blood-shot eyes were thrilling into him. He tried to speak, and merely made gasping movements with his throat. He lifted on his elbow, and his face, flushing with a resurge of blood, grew frantic, desperate. He tottered to his feet, and shook his defiance with the one fist that was his.

Another lightning blow from the dark-eyed man sent him into the grate and blackened embers.

The raging man held out a key—shining new.

Stash gasped: "Where did you get that?"—but no sound came from his throat. He saw that there had been some treachery. . . . Walewski! . . . he had hired them . . . to get the papers.

"Give me just dem figures—*quick!*" And Laughing Jesus held a blue barreled revolver against Stash's bleeding ear.

Marika sprang frantically from the arms of the horse-faced man, who was roaring: "The combination, by God, quick!"

"*He can't speak!*" she rasped in the ghost of a voice. "*He can't talk!*" It had come to her with a horrible clearness that the demon, Laughing Jesus, would send death crashing into Stash's ear in another minute—unless he spoke—and that something had taken away his voice.

She threw herself above him, with arms raised, crying still: "He can't speak!"

The wild brain of Laughing Jesus seemed to grasp it vaguely;—but a hammering on the front door sent a thrill of furor through the black and blood-shot eyes

and—twisting Marika's arm by the thin wrist—he seemed to drive the barrel into Stash's ear. "De figures!" he roared. And that roar seemed to blur, seemed to freeze Marika's wits like a poison vapor. She saw that blue barrel growing out of Stash's bronze head—saw it shattering before her eyes—if, if, if she did not! . . . *Oh, Stash!* . . .

With a rage that seemed to grind aside great doors in her brain, she burst into a crystal of super clearness . . . dazzling colors danced before her—the red wires in Laughing Jesus' eyes—the purple barrel—the brown beard—the white mantel—the black embers! . . . She snatched one of those embers in her free hand and put it in Stash's, crying:

"Write—he will write!" Guiding his hand against the white enamel she helped him scrawl: "*3 left 4 right 7 left.*"

Laughing Jesus plunged across to the safe, while the hammering on the door boomed louder. The bearded man flung a shot from his revolver through the panel. A shout rang out.

"Tom!" screamed Marika.

In another moment the French window crashed in with a splintering rain of glass, and Karshenko, like a gipsy giant, burst through and fronted Laughing Jesus—who leapt from the safe with his gun on the deadly hang. . . . His eyes wavered . . . he fell back a step . . . he failed somehow to shoot.

In that instant Karshenko had sprung low for his hips and sent him crashing against the safe. Tom Shieling had swung in behind him and Hartranft, Tom twisting a torn sleeve around a bleeding arm.

Fentree staggered in from the hall. The others—with Drumgoole—had slipped out. The wolf leader

was alone: his eyes flicking wildly about as he lifted himself from the fancy paneled safe.

"We got you, my boy!" shouted the blacksmith. But at that moment the wolf man sprang for his revolver; and again Karshenko, catching him by the coat sleeve, whirled around and sent him crashing against the wall. The blacksmith now snatched up the revolver and leveled it on Laughing Jesus.

Shieling had helped Stash to his feet, and he stood staring at the wolf man with the same twisting uncanny feeling in his brain. . . . Blood was pouring from the fellow's forehead, and he was breathing in great gasps, but tried to smile: "You got me, cull!—but say, I want to tell you—if I could get my wind—I would go you again—but I ain' . . . I ain' right . . . *since dat time!* . . ."

Stash knew he meant the mine blast; and Fentree must have guessed his meaning, for he too stared with the same fascination.—And Marika suddenly drew tighter the arm supporting Stash as if some terrible surmise had come to her.

The wolf man's eyes began to swim; and he clucked his tongue rapidly and foolishly in the roof of his mouth—in embarrassment and search of what to say. But Tom Shieling's grasp on his arm galvanized his energy, and he began a terrible struggle with Shieling and the blacksmith, shouting, twisting like a huge fish, glaring with his black, blood-misted eyes.

At last they held him secure: one arm bent back on either side and his head toppled back against the top cornice of the safe. His torn black shirt showed his straining white chest and arm, and his eyes roving out over them looked as though he were laughing. In some insane, grotesque way he seemed hang-

ing there by his outstretched arms—prefiguring his sinister nickname—Laughing Jesus. But when he straightened his head they saw that he was crying instead of laughing:

“Oh, God! . . . don’ send me back there!”

“Where—the pen?” demanded Hartranft.

The man nodded: “I can’ stand that! I had my pluck wid me—but God!—dey give me de hole! . . . In de dark I sees her white feet comin’—in a little white shoe—on-a-comin’—on-a-comin’!—like I use’ to see—‘Christ lift me!’ I hollers. . . . *Den dey come!*—” he drew a long, quivering breath. . . . “‘I know what he wants!’ Harris say, ‘calling God for dem feet!’”

The wolf man was no longer staring at them, but straight ahead into some terrible mirage of memory; and studding points of fear prickled in their brains as they watched.

“‘*Give it to um lying!*’ he say—an’ den—I *couldn’ get round it no way,*” screamed the wolf man, “*I was tied!*”

The loudest noise in the room was the long hysterical breaths he was dragging. Suddenly Karshenko gave a horrible grunt—or groan. He twisted the man’s bare arm so that a purple scar caught the light—such a scar as he had seen on Varsh’s arm in the blacksmith shop.

He caught him by the shoulder, bellowing hoarsely: “Why *didn’t* you tell me, boy—for Christ Jesus!—is it you, boy!” He was stroking the man’s bare arm gently now, or swinging off to clash his great hands together in an anguish of grief. “What dey doin’ to you, boy?” he muttered vaguely.

Stash stood as if paralyzed. It seemed to him a

dream. A vast roaring in his head . . . as of some tremendous ship's engines . . . and a feeling of instability as if he were moving—moving on . . . confused his senses. . . . The white paneling of the room was like a ship's. . . . *Did they mean it was Varsh?* . . . But Varsh couldn't be here. . . . This was that man Laughing Jesus who had tried to save Stan Brezki in Koban mine . . . Yet Varsh's merry-mournful eyes . . . He tried to speak—if he could only! . . .

He shivered as that Laughing Jesus approached him. . . . It was Varsh's tearful grin wrung dry: "Say, Stash-a-boy!—I didn't mean ta—I been crazy against you, dat's right!—after dat time you t'row me at de theatre. . . . *Oh, God!* boy, you brought dat man to spoil it all for me! *Say you did, boy!* So she got all strange! . . . *Say you did!"*

Stash made an uncouth noise.

A sudden start of pity came to Varsh's face: "I forget you can' speak——" He patted Stash's shoulder. . . . "I—I'm sorry—I have to make myself crazy to do it, Stash-boy!" He gave a great whinnying shout as he threw up his arms: "I thought you all go against me! . . . You was in dat mine business! . . . an' you! . . ." he pointed to Fentree, whose damp temples shone pallidly . . . "I ain' been well since den . . ." he apologized, with hands outthrown and that tearful smile wrenched dry.

Marika reached out and took his hand with its black sleeve stripped back. He put his other on it—then found that he had bloodied hers and tried to slick it off with his dirty sleeve. . . . Then burst into a rage of horrible sobbing. . . .

He sprang back and shouted at them: "I can'—I can'—Goddam you all . . . to hell! . . . you can'

hold me . . . I'm goin'!" he roared; and before they could move, he had lashed through the window and vanished in the hot night.

CHAPTER V.

I

The next morning Stash looked out into the grove-like depths of the Park house yard. He had wakened with a start from anguished, delirious dreaming. He was whispering rapidly and jerkily when Mrs. Fentree came into the room:

"You tell Fen to . . . it's all right. . . . Varsh had to go that way . . . and I will too . . . because all the Plazarskis . . . that's what they say. . . . When I get out of this haunted house, I'll show him . . . not to worry. . . . It's not Rose Maddon steering the music ship . . . just her ghost . . . I can tell that," he nodded sagely, "because she's singing in such a lil' girl's voice. . . . But Marika's the star that will get me out of it. . . . Tell Fen not to worry. . . ."

He staggered to his feet in the disheveled clothes of last night, looming tall and haggard above her. "I'll tell him—I'll tell him!" she pushed him gently back to the bed, where he subsided, and fell into sounder sleep.

And she did repeat to Fentree, pacing below, such parts of Stash's delirious message as she thought might help him. There was more need than ever for Andre to be near her father. As Stash grew better in the cooler days that followed, he heard them talking and walking on the flagged walk below his window.

II

Louise's announcements were hurried out; and a vacation forced on Fentree. Yet he walked downtown to his new office every day, Stash now accompanying him.

"I suppose it's time for me to give up the hard fighting," Fentree said. "Louise will be married . . . I can let down."

Stash glanced aside at him: it seemed pitiful to be talking of giving up what had been crushed out of one. As for himself, he could plan nothing. A gulf divided him from the past.

It was only when with Marika that he felt an eagerness and vague wistful intent. Since Marika had saved him that night from Varsh she had held herself in a tender detachment. And yet at times she would come so near to him: clenching his hand in both of hers; telling him that he could not give up! "Ever since that day," she said, "when you came out after I told you I wouldn't go to that party with you—when you took it so gay as if I hadn't been mean!—and saved me from such a feeling!"—she struck her fist against her breast—"I've so wanted to pay you back, Stash! . . . *never can* forget that time, never! . . . See, I would do anything for you . . . even after I knew you loved *her*."

Stash stripped a scale of bark from a crooked sycamore where many initials had been carved. "Maybe I did—sometimes," said he, "but I think it was because she was always the little Princess to me . . . *Rose Maddon*. . . ."

"Yes, just her name charms you, I know!" Marika turned her wistful smile away from him. "But," she

added, "you don't mention the rest of it—that she was sweet and beautiful."

"That was while I was with her that I thought that," Stash muttered; "but you . . . even when I've been away . . . I've seen you! . . . just as if you called! . . . And I was too busy in fool schemes to go. . . . I was just too crazy to know I wanted you, and . . . wanted you, Rika!" He was carried away by his own desolate clear vision of it.

"Almost any time," Marika responded feverishly, "I would have—oh, gone just anywhere if you had said! . . . But then a time came when I had to be happy without you . . ." she paused; and Stash saw the hot moody summertime when he had refused the call of a little Marika trying to be happy without him. He reached for her hand, but she did not respond. She was gazing out across the sunny flats with a rigid, passionate intentness: "And I learned to love something—oh, terribly!—so no matter how bad it looked I could go into it, yes, just with a feeling of glory!"

She turned back with her caught-up smile: "It's like a mother loves a mean, plain baby—*hardest!* . . . There's such lots of plain babies, too!" she smiled. "Oh, Stash!" her eyes blazed, "I turned everything I loved into loving all those poor, terrible people, like at Koban mines. . . . And it was grander, more wonderful, more like a beautiful, terrible music that goes on forever—shining, and shining—and shining!"

Stash stood bewildered, his brain prickling with wonder and fear. Her eyes were shining . . . with tears.

"People"—she added harshly—"like Varsh."

He saw for the first time how much he had lost; but at the same moment he caught a flash of the miracle that had dawned for Marika: a miracle that

made a music of desolation, that might even rush *him* on through the consolation his aching mind sought—into a dread darkness which suddenly—seen through her words—became grandly beautiful!—Like the blacksmith's pity for Varsh. All of this coursed through his mind in fragmentary whirling, dying away at last into the heartache that he had earned for himself.

CHAPTER VI

I

At Louise's wedding he saw Rose once more. Her smiling, laughing manner was in strange disparity with the white refinement that sadness or worry had worked about her pointed chin and lips. Where illness or sadness made Marika's features too poignant, it gave an added beauty to Rose Maddon's small red lips and curving brows.

"I feel as if since yesterday one of my wickedness' is wiped out," she told him, as they wandered away from the room where Louise's presents were on inspection: "they looked for me, real hopefully, to worship Hugh. I almost did—until I saw they counted on it. Just like me to turn right about, wasn't it?"

"And do your worshipping farther East," Stash added. They fell silent, as if a slight estrangement, rather sad than unfriendly, had come between them.

"She'll be happy," said Rose, "I think. I'm sorry about Mr. Janvier. Andre's too brave to show it. It seemed to me as though when she spoke of his going, her lip quivered." Her own lip faltered as she spoke.

Stash nodded: "He'll be down to say good-bye this

week before he goes to Valcartier. You know he was born in Canada."

Rose Maddon nodded in return. "Seeing Louise married here in this house is as if I had seen my own girl-time here finished out, and said good-bye to it." They had come to the front gate. She turned impulsively and put out her hand to his: "Good-bye, Stash!" It seemed to him that her under lip faltered again, as she said "Good-bye."

II

Janvier's visit coincided with the strange offer that came to Stash through Fentree. In the excitement of the Canadian's departure the effect of Maddon-Marantle's offer on Stash was hardly noticed—unless by Fentree. It was merely a verbal invitation through the lawyer, but with its promise of rapid preferment came a freshening rumor of Rose Maddon's faltering good-bye voice, floating in Stash's ear with a lingering chime and promise of her own. A queer creeping thrill awoke in his heart—coursed on to the tips of his mind and body. It was like a shudder of returning happiness—*happiness*, that had died in his heart long ago. Could it be!—could it be that all this chaos of the last months was a bad dream that could be folded away!—and in time forgotten? . . . Could it be that Rose Maddon—little Rose Maddon, whose name was like the caress of a perfumed scarf across his lips, whose darling pinky image had first excited his small boy fancy—could it be that such a Rose had flung him a token and a sign? He guessed by Fentree's elation that the offer could only have come with Maddon's cognizance. He tried to picture the event between Rose and her father that might have brought it about.

Had she accused him of wronging or injuring Stan Plazarski? He frowned at this thought . . . and then smiled a wistful, eager smile. His mind seemed torn this way and that. He bit the lips that muttered her name. He walked about like a man in a dream.

Little wonder that in such a condition he found a poignant meaning in Janvier's farewell:

"If you ever feel," the stocky fellow ended, "that you're at a loose end, Plazarski, and it's going to make a good many feel that way—this war—there's a way out. Don't come on a chance—but if something pulls you—— I'll write you occasionally." He gripped Stash's hands.

His last words to Andre were different: "Do you remember a long time ago when I asked you to pardon me that someone had stepped on my face?"

Andre looked at the stern short face with the masterful greenish-hazel eyes, and nodded, smiling: "Your accordion face—it was on the *Lady Island*."

"Of course it was," said Janvier. "I wondered if you'd remember."

"Remember!" said Andre scornfully, and winking fiercely.

"Well, my heart, too, I spoke about that, didn't I? Before you stepped on it France had made it go *zooch*! And will you pardon me that, too?—that she made it go *zooch* first?"

Andre could find nothing to say, but patted the rocky, somehow noble face for answer.

The day after Raoul's leave brought word of Varsh's arrest at Turba. He was held to answer with two other strikers for the Turba Tower explosion. Tony Marzak brought Stash the secret news that Karshenko had gone north to get the boy! This would have been

enough to confuse Stash's plans. But after that came the stunning message that he should be at Varika's on the night of the seventh and hold himself ready until that time for any call to help.

Again his mind was in chaos: he could think of no way out. He had a feeling that Varsh had been "goated" or "framed"—as Tony said. And yet he recoiled from the thought of outraging the law. It was wrong—wrong! Even if Varsh was the victim of some snarl of injustice and evil fate, it was wrong. And if Varsh was guilty—it was doubly wrong. Yet the answer was easy from one angle: to hold aloof and let events take their course—to accept Maddon's offer and plunge into work.

But he could not work! He found himself useless in Fentree's office. He was in a trap. A terrible dreary fate had prepared a test for him that threw his soul and mind into crashing turmoil from which there seemed no outlet.

But the test had come! It had come in *this shape*—cutting savagely across all rules of right and wrong, and fair or crooked—squarely across *everything*—everything except *loyalty*. Would Marika expect him to stand by? . . . He was pledged to her to stand true to those he truly loved!

Did he love Varsh? . . . He thought of him with horrible racking pity. If Varsh had ever had such chances as his own he would have been twice the man! For Varsh was always true to those he loved! A hundred pictures of the boy Varsh ran through his head: Varsh who had rowed and carried him about the lake, who had taken the ugly fish off his line; Varsh who had always defended him and laughed at danger! *Suddenly he saw himself in Varsh's place . . .*

saw Marika pleading with Varsh to help . . . saw the great boy with the merry black eyes . . . hesitating? . . . *no!* . . . but leaping to defend, to save Stash-a-boy at any cost!

Should he see that brother railroaded into prison again—the horror house that had blasted his soul as the mine had blasted his nerves . . . *no! no!* . . . not if he could help it! . . . not if he could clench his own slack heart and nerve together, and sweep behind him the rosy glamour of all his old dreams. Good-bye to that! He snatched one backward look, as a small Stash had at the big boat that had brought him across the Lake. . . . Good-bye then to the dream of great ships on the Lakes. Good-bye . . . to the little Princess of Castle Durand.

The mystic figure of the musical ship towered over him—pointing the way.

CHAPTER VII

I

The night of the seventh came; and Stash was in Varika's grove when a car swept in from the west, and the lantern in Varika's hand showed the wild-eyed Karsh, a big slouch-hatted driver, and Varsh . . . coatless and with blood gummed wrist.

He listened breathless under the rustling night trees to the blacksmith's story of wild assumption. He saw the huge militia guarded meeting, and its motion pictures taken by electric fusees to surprise and expose the "dynamiters" publicly; saw the wild turmoil and Karsh's men flinging out great Polish shawls that muf-

fled the guards and hid themselves and coiled Varsh and guard in a blinding tight sack. . . . They had dropped the Polander shawls and the guard by the resounding dark lake shore and boomed on south.

Karshenko told the story in harsh, broken words. A mourning dove somewhere in the trees woke to complain. The big driver cautioned Varika to darken his lantern. The sound of his voice brought Stash's head forward. It was Tom Shieling.

With a dim glimmer to light them they took Varsh across the flats to the deserted mining village, and hid him in one of the cabins. Even then his last word was not to big Karsh. With his good hand he caught Stash's hand and muttered: "Stash—Stash-a-boy!—you come!"

II

There he stayed in the huddle of creeking cabins for two nights. But during the third night he came tearing across the flats to Varika's. He was panting terribly. They had come! he said. He had heard them muttering before they reached his cabin.

"We gotto get him away to-night!" Varika told Stash the next morning. He had brought the younger brother out from town. The little Czech, who had hidden Varsh in his barn, was terribly perturbed. He fought with Marika to keep her from taking part; but promised the three horses for the night.

Evening came on, and the shadows began to lodge gloomily in the sycamores. The night insects creaked in desultory shrillness. Varsh accepted the plan for him in dumb agitation. Stash had got one of the farm hands to shave the wolf brother; and he showed a pitiable white face, scarred and sunken, in the last eve-

ning light. It was like a terrible crumbled reflection of Stash himself.

The sky in the west grew pink, and dulled. . . . And then another light sprang up . . . and within a short space brought everyone out under the trees. The mining town was on fire. Stash guessed some sinister purpose in it.

It grew darker in the grove and the first excited talk fell. The night breeze shook softly in the sycamores and from far across the flats came the crackling report of timbers falling. The fields looked as if lighted with a russet red moon or the coming of a peculiar storm. Two of the Shabbata boys drove in on the rust-tinged road, their stout Bohemian faces taking a sheen of copper.

While the hubbub of greeting raged, Stash and Marika hurried Varsh around to the dark side of the house, where the horses were waiting. . . . They struck off for the road of the old tamarack dark turn, avoiding the glimmer that flickered on the wide flats.

Following a roundabout course they reached town on the west. Lights appeared in lengths and reaches, and streets streamed on ahead. At times they hushed the flurrying staccato of hoofs to listen. . . . They reached Father Dubrowski's dark house on Shabbona safely, and the small, dark, stained-faced father showed Stash where to tie the horses in the rear.

Passing under the shadow of the brick wall which separated the church from the narrow yard, Stash heard a low whistle. He thought for the moment that it was Father Jan's, but learned inside that it was not.

Varsh sat in the darkened back room under a dim light from the sapphire sputter of the gas mantle. He

caught the murmur of alarm in their manner, and began breathing sharply. He clutched Marika's sleeve: "My God, Rika, I can' bother you no more! Let me go now. . . . I say good-bye to you! . . ." He took her hand in his and covered it with his bandaged hand. There was no blood on it to-night to soil hers.

"I say good-bye to you, lil' Rika . . . and you . . . you say good-bye to her!" There was a haunting dignity about him, the reckless big curves of his face thrown back.

Something was twisting unbearably in Marika's throat. "No!—*no!*" she whispered passionately, mothering his bandaged hand with hers. . . . In her extremity of choking anguish she turned to Stash. . . . As if in some way he would find a way to help. . . .

She saw his head lunged forward, his eyes staring blank, as if stricken by some paralysis of horror or anger. A strange mad scheme had come to him—born of the sickening sight of that face of Varsh so like his own. He grasped Varsh's arm with a brusque wild sweep of power:

"I'll change with you," he flung out hoarsely, "they've been watching here! Now they've gone for help. . . . Some Durand force . . . they'll be back . . . they'll find me here! . . . I'll be *you!* Marika'll take you out the back way—down Shabbona, then you go to the old Wabash depot—understand! . . . Come on, then!"

Varsh protested with an angry sob, as if he couldn't bear such kindness from old Stash-a-boy—whose littleness he had carried on his back in memory so long.

But big Stash slid an arm under his and led him swiftly through the hall, muttering in a low, hoarse

336 STASH OF THE MARSH COUNTRY

crooning a steadying encouragement as he ran. To this accompaniment he tore off Varsh's rough clothes, and forced his own on the broken, nerve-shattered wolf man. . . . Then—for there was no time to lose—led him at a rush through the hall, where huge canvases caught a dim black sheen.

Marika was ready. There were a few minutes to wait before the clanging car droned down Shabbona Street; and she smoothed the wrinkled sleeve on Varsh's arm with short, swift touches.

The car came on with a jolting clangor. Father Jan flung open the front door; Marika led Varsh to the crossing and got on. The car hummed down the dusky depth, and was lost in the dull sounding of the town.

Stash sat with head on his hands thinking—with a torrential drumming of thoughts—until Marika returned. White faced and trembling, she had little to say. . . . Everything still in doubt. Stash learned that she hadn't entered the station for fear of drawing attention.

They sat in the semi-dark; and the same pictures were forming in their minds . . . of Varsh in the grimy old Station . . . white and clean faced, as if dressed and anointed for some rite—and waiting—waiting.

Marika's eyes were drawn irresistibly to Stash in his dirty torn clothes. . . . Somehow she couldn't bear it, and crossed agitatedly to the piano. She touched it . . . but that she couldn't bear, either. . . . Every melody she thought of—filled with awful, sweet memories. . . . Even some little *oberta* she had learned while Stash was away was connected with dreams or thoughts of him. . . . Stash was in them all. And

yet she commanded herself to be brave and daring for him:

"What'll I play?" she asked tremulously.

Stash was looking sharply at her as if fascinated, with a strange smile on his big, daring face—as if he had glimpsed something beyond, beyond, far beyond her—and yet must look through her gold black eyes to see it—something wildly, wonderfully beautiful. . . . Stars beyond the dark!

"*O Gwiadeczko'll do!*" He made an abrupt glad gesture with Varsh's battered soft hat clenched in his fist.

Marika played it through once; the room swelled with the infinite humming of a lonely wild-land, vast beyond all sadness, splendid beyond all gloom. Trying it again her fingers stumbled; and she turned to Stash with hands held out, angrily protesting. . . . The tears were streaming down her face: "I told you all about such a gladness," she cried harshly, "in the dark!—so that I could take it. . . . But now when you are going—maybe to prison—that's all gone—like nothing just falling to . . . nothing!"

Stash sprang to his feet: "But *I* see it now," he muttered hoarsely, "Rika!—*I see it now*—something!—something—that you can take it like you said! . . . *I see—I see!*"

With his chin thrust high, he stood looking above—beyond her. . . . *It had come to him!* . . . the enterprise of loyalty! . . . and it was more splendid than all. . . .

She saw him as if swept on—by a miracle of movement—as if leaving some mooring behind—as if swaying on—on—as if on some ship—moving—moving. . . . Behind him in the dimness looming, tall mourn-

ful hats rode on a red sunset sea. . . . And from the daunting stormy faces that rode beneath—he had caught something that belonged to him.

The rumbling that she feared had come at last. The bell jangled through the house . . . the porch thundered . . . they thrust into the hall:

“No use to run—we got a post in back!”

But Stash had not attempted to run. Instead, he had picked up a chair and rushed at them. A leveled revolver brought him to a dead halt. The chair toppled from his hands . . . which he held out to them. He had thrust Varsh’s hat over his forehead.

“Pull off that hat!” someone called. It was the greenish-faced Drumgoole with his grin of lazy depravity.

The officer snatched it off.

“Got the wrong guy!” sneered the pebbled-faced man behind Drumgoole, “I told you so! He’s the one Drum saw get on the car with *her*!”

“Well, how’s he here again?” the bewildered “harness” man asked.

“I mean *our* fellow got on the car!” the yellow mottled face turned red spotted with rage. “He’s at Shab-bony station now and gone!” He cursed their stupidity, and led the charge for the open door where the night wind was whipping in.

III

In the droning gloom of the old train sheds Varsh stood waiting. Though the night was warm, his hand—gripping the ticket that Stash had given him the money to get—was sweaty cold. The large concourse clock echoed ten. Every moment now he thought he

heard the drum of the train on the bridge. . . . He kept remembering how Marika had brushed out his wrinkled sleeve. Later he could think back to that little thing. They had made him clean with that coat . . . and with something else. . . . He doubted not that some further wonderful transformation awaited him. . . . When not so dazed and tender he would think back to that little thing—*smoothing his sleeve with her little hand!*

Blind spots suddenly cruised before his eyes . . . and between these lesions of terror he saw faces—triumphant and terrible!

“Got you—Pla—zazzie!”

He fell back against the iron grille. The touch of the rigid wall spurred him out. Before they could draw!—from the last peak of defiance and despair he hurled himself at them. . . . Suddenly he was in the dark. . . . Then a crashing light glared through him—blazing down his scorched, astonished soul. . . . But he awoke to life again—such as in a dream. . . . Something wept and sang for him! . . . Then a faint humming like infinite, unknown news thinning down a dim wire . . . dimming . . . out.

CHAPTER VIII

I

Stash leaned out from the saddle, fumbling in the dark for Marika's hand—gave it a hard squeeze—and—it seemed to him—*roared* out of the echoing brick alley. The staccato scurry of the hoofs on the wider street separated itself from his rushing thought—only

reminding him now and then that "Podvodnik"—like Marika's last gift and touch—was moving like a machine beneath him. . . .

A thousand reverberations of his old life drained through his mind, like the gritty crooning of the street car's dwindling hum, like the thousand noises of the city's drab dull roar sinking behind him. He crossed the Pentwater and Turba canal, and drummed on over the dark causeways of the marsh country. Sometimes a snipe whipped by with its crippled wheepling cry—like one of his own thoughts lapsing into the past. . . . Why hadn't he rushed them!—with all his strength!—held them up just a little longer! *But Marika had been in back of him!* His mind cringed like a crumbling red cinder from the danger he had run in raising that chair!—the bare threat enough to make those fellows shoot! The thought of Marika killed, through him, was like the thundering end of everything. . . . But Varsh!—if he could only know about him! But better he didn't!—glad he couldn't! No, no!—anything to crush the terrible feeling that Varsh was *gone!* His thoughts streamed back—like the black willow banks. . . . That Turba town had done it—that man-killer town!—no, the *mine!*—Fentree's mine!—no, no! not Fentree!—nor Jennika!—nor the old hotel—nor himself!—No! no!—A horrified sweet roll of memories poured like an organ blast through his mind. . . . Oh, *Varsh!*—his heart whined. . . . Oh, big Varsh on the marsh lake with him! . . . Merry-mournful old Varsh! . . .

Those man-killers—Turba, the mine, the prison—had crushed him in! . . . Like that fight when Tom Shieling had battered his face! . . . The unescapable endless memories! . . . Durand, Durand, Durand—he

had called Durand a man-killer town . . . but he had always liked that name—Durand, Durand, Durand. . . . “If we’d held closer hands!” Andre had said once at Gossians. Instead of pulling apart. . . . If they’d all held closer hands, closer hands, closer hands! . . . What was back of it all? . . . The unbearable torrent of thought ran on! . . . Oh, Marika!—closer hands with you! Why hadn’t he!—Oh, Marika!—if there is only something beyond all the dark! It seems, it seems almost, at moments, that he can see!—beyond, beyond the dark! . . .

II

Podvodnik lunged into a startled gallop—at some instinctive thrust of Stash’s knee—or perhaps some warning vibration from far down the road. . . . Now that he had stopped Stash could hear it—the pounding exhaust of a machine. . . . A dark marshy pool banked with pines lay on the left. He sent Podvodnik crashing among the trees; and waited with a vague thrill of wonder and expectation chilling the back of his neck and head.

The toppling glare of the machine came trundling on . . . burst by . . . and diminished into the north. . . . With Varsh’s battered hat cutting a sawed-down, savage outline in the pale star-light, Stash emerged and sent Podvodnik skittering along in his splendid running-groove tattoo.

He took his course east by north, relying on his sense of friendly roads—and on the stars. . . . These trembled brightly as he scoured on, as the sky grew darker with its blue, dusk bloom.

He crossed the state line at Kincaid; got a fresh horse; paid for Podvodnik’s putting-up; and moved

on into lower Michigan; while the stars paled and twinkled pallid, and the dawn came swiftly on.

III

He caught an early interurban express into Detroit, and crossed the hurrying azure straits. He saw the bright water slapping at the foot of Joseph Campau Avenue—and turned quickly to look the other way. The Canadian shore crept nearer with each souging shower of the bow. He looked back again—and it was as if his hands leapt out to vanishing memories unutterably poignant and dear—and dark with a bitter regret.

A horrible hate sprang up in him as he looked—a rolling agony of longing—for harsh nameless satisfaction—for revenge! He watched the city fall back:—to him—in its morning brightness—distantly, tremulously, splendidly serene. . . . But behind that splendor of water-dancing avenue ends were Durand and Turba and a hundred other *killer* towns . . . a whole country that had no use for him or Varsh. Never mind!—he could throw himself into the fight against the great killer country of all the world; and after that dark. . . . But the dark came first! He clenched his hands. *Into it now!* And beyond that dark—such a dawn maybe!—such a morning dawn of all the golden stars. . . .

CHAPTER IX

I

The first weeks in camp worked a strange change in Stash Plazarski. He had merely thrown himself on

Janvier and the war as a way out. But under Raoul's guidance he had joined the Canadian forces at Valcartier, and with the passing of the first confusion he found his mind clearing of the passion and despair of those last days in the land below the Lakes.

He looked back at that Land now. He had lived there once—in the midst of its turmoil and cruel towns. But strangest thing of all to him, as he stood on guard duty under the chill brilliance of the Canadian night and stars, was the thought that he had ever hated it!

How could he ever have hated a country that Fentree belonged to? He looked back to his farthest recollections of that man. They were the memories of a tiny boy—when the thin-faced lawyer had sat beside him at Koban Hotel dances—and he had thought him the best man in the world—next to Uncle Jan. . . .

He thought—with what a thrill of remembered happiness!—of later days: of walking home abreast with Fen from old Shabbona Station. . . . He saw the shady stretch of Wacaser Street in the cool noon quiet . . . and imagined himself there once again! . . . It came to him then like a wonderful discovery—that he loved it all! *Not because it was ideal*—but because it had a beauty all its own!—such as he couldn't bear to lose. He remembered that he had felt the same about the old hostinets times: that they were far from ideal!—but that they held some sweetness—some beauty that had fallen short only so far as *he* had failed to realize it—failed in loyal return to his friends.

He had failed toward old Mac, in deserting to the vain enterprise of mines and shipping. He had failed toward old Scarbro, deserting him in Detroit in his

sickness—the old man's only friend! He had failed toward Fentree, throwing aside the chance to work with him and help him accomplish his dreams. He had thrown that chance away—for what?—What could it have been? . . . A job at Slason's theatre and a dance at Maddon's on the hill! . . . He had not been loyal.

And his disloyalty had not only betrayed himself, but it had brought tragedy to others: possibly Varsh's ruin—possibly Fentree's collapse. Looking back now, he saw so clearly how these could have been averted. . . . If he had only stuck by Varsh and Fen! . . . Fen would have helped him to save Varsh! . . . Then all together, by grace of loyalty, they could have been saved! But *he* was always hundreds of miles away when misfortune was gathering about his people and Fentree's.

It was strange that with his accusation of his own disloyalty he could see no disloyalty in Fentree's later course. In his heart he guarded him from that thought, and devised a thousand excuses for him. He laid the lawyer's mistakes to the harsh and cruel complexity of the country that had ruined Varsh! And that country was the *under side* of America.

He saw now that there were *two Americas*: the one that had destroyed Varsh, and the one that Fentree and good old Mac belonged to . . . and Andre! and Tallant! and Marion!—and, yes, and the Varikas! They were all part of that Land across the Lakes—that land of turmoil and treachery and mistaken aims.

At times he must grit his teeth again at that country that had killed Varsh! Marika had written him of Varsh's death. But as he thought over her letter at night he felt again—with devastating force—*that he*

himself had helped kill Varsh—by not standing by him. He—Sergeant Stanislaw Plazarski—belonged to both Americas!—within the land that had destroyed Varsh and all his gay, eager family. For he, Stash, with his turbulent spirit, and gang wrangling, and absorbing fierce interest in himself, had belonged to the harsh and careless country—to the killer towns.

He saw that he must take the two countries just as they were . . . for they were mingled in *him!*—and he belonged to them! They had given him the Fentrees, and they had given him the Koban Lake people and all the sad beauty and tragedy of the glimmering marsh country, where he had been a boy.

It was a long time before he could accept and reconcile the two Americas. Even then he did not quite reconcile them. He just accepted them. . . . As he had accepted wild and generous old Varsh in his last tragic call for help—with a leaping surge of loyalty!—loyalty that is the greatest gift of all. . . .

And in spite of his growing love for Raoul and his other great-hearted comrades of the Canadian Arms, in spite of his enthusiasm for the Air Force into which he had transferred, he had begun at last to long for the time when he could fight for the Land below Ontario . . . that land of sad and strange and exalting beauty . . . the land of the lakes, and the city where he was born . . . of the Fentrees and big Mac and Varika . . . the land that was his own.

II

And the chance came to go back.

He was sent down, on Captain Janvier's recommendation, to raise recruits among the Czech farmers

and Sokol lodges. He had learned from Marika's letters to expect certain changes at Koban Lake. . . . Among these that the lake itself had come back. The ramp breach had been re-filled; the river had swollen with fall rains; and winter had brought back the great sheet of marsh water.

It was for Stash now to use that word *swoboda!*—which he had laughed at in Varika's mouth. And he apologized to the little man—the afternoon before he left—sitting on a bench in the grove: "You remember the time you told us—Andre and me—that the trouble was people had gotten seedy on *swoboda*?"

"We must never do dat again!" Varika shook his head decisively: "yes—yes!—*I remember!* . . ." he sighed.

There was another mistake that Stash could never make again: to think that Marika could be anything but strangely, wonderfully beautiful. When he sat by the slip-slapping cove that night, he told her that his flying contingent would be going over-seas the next month. He clasped her hand in his two big quivering hands: "I'm going maybe for ever!"

"But I'll wait for you forever, Stash!" she cried, as he poured out a torrent of pleading, "I will always! There is nobody for me but you, forever and ever! . . . Ever since you stood in our store . . . little timid boy . . . an' got so sudden all frisky an' daring that you were astonished at yourself! . . . Ever since—ever since!"

III

The next morning they clasped hands in farewell, and Stash brusquely kissed the caught-up lip and the

flushed cheek below the black and gold eyes that would not cry.

Varika rowed him across the lake to the crowded green waiting-room on the Valley Electric side. Among those with tickets to Canada via Detroit were two of the Bezdek boys, Andy Marzak and great loud Bart Shabbata. He—Bart—who had one time planted a sliver of suspicion in Stash's boy head—clasped Stash and Varika both about the shoulders. It was always his dream to monopolize all the prestige and glory in sight. Stash's Canadian uniform was a cynosure among that boisterous, virile crowd.

"You fellows that aren't in now," Stash spoke with a ring of expectant pride, "will follow us fellows when America comes in! We'll all be together then!"

Varika simply couldn't take his gaze away from "the boy"—and that little maple leaf glittering—glittering in the morning sun. His eyes grew red with a suffusion of pride and joy—and something else he hardly dared think of, for fear he would have to "quit de public!" Not but that he could keep as firm a hand on himself as anybody! . . . anyway until—until the electric train gonged rapidly out of sight down the humming rails.

It was a gusty March morning. And Koban Lake shone brisk and blue, rustling hoarsely by the shore road, as it had that first morning when Stash and Mist Fen drove fast along the shore.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

NON-RENEWABLE

REC'D LD-URI

FEB 19 1998

ILL-APR

MAR 13 1998

DUE 2 WKS FROM DATE RECEIVED

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 126 964 e

